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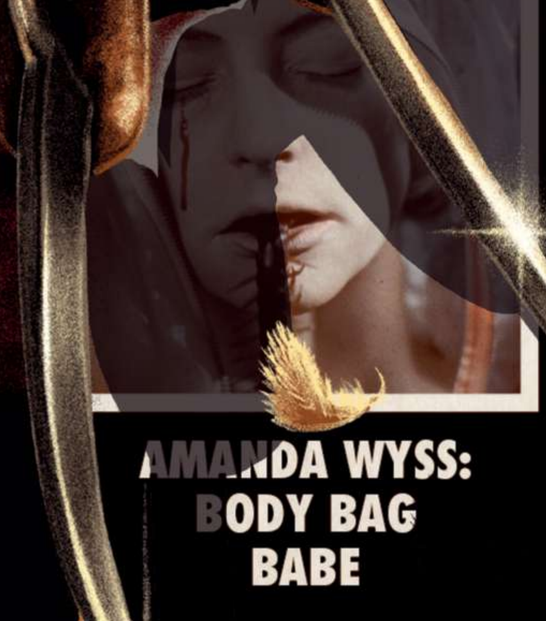

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This issue is dedicated to Bill Cobbs, Charles Cyphers, Shannen Doherty, Shelley Duvall, Greg Kihn, Jon Landau, Whitney Rydbeck, and Donald Sutherland.

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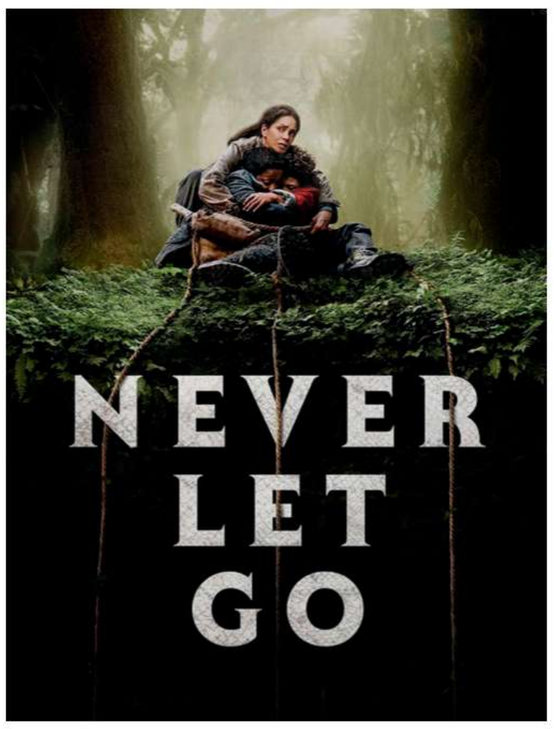
INVOCATION

You're Not The Boss Of Me



Horror titles have really taken a turn for the bossy lately, haven't they? Seems like every other horror movie title is a demand or a request or, at the very least, stern advice. *Speak No Evil. Don't Breathe. Don't Move. Smile. Never Let Go. Terrify Her.* (Wait; I read that last one wrong. Still, you get me.)

Title trends are amusing to follow, and this recent whole sentence, second-person mandate movement is particularly hilarious. And it seems a shame to confine it to horror, because I think it's a naming convention that could really flourish in other genres…

Military Drama: *Answer The Call*

Religious Film: *Answer His Call*

Domestic Thriller: *Answer My Call*

You get the idea. A mob movie called *Keep Your Damn Mouth Shut*. A Western called *Screw You and the Horse You Rode in On*. A Muppet movie called *Bring Me the Head of Kermit the Frog*. The possibilities are endless!

No shade at all to the trend, and as evidenced by titles like *Apartment 7A*, *Heretic*, *Little Bites* and *Black Eyed Susan*, it's not at epidemic levels yet. And I think having an imperative as a title can be catchy as hell. As all the *Don't* movies (*…Answer the Phone*; *…Go in the House*; *…Look in the Basement*) of the vintage era of exploitation proved, they're mood-inducing and they look great on a poster. At the same time, watching marketing teams play follow the leader can be a cynicism-inducing activity, and these titles that sometimes blend together often feel like coattail-riding. (The above-mentioned, excellent movies excepted, of course.)

If you think I'm wrong, watch how many shingles try to copy the $100 million-grossing *Longlegs* marketing playbook in the next 12 months. When Hollywood lands on an idea that works, they can and will wring it dry, and often take away all the wrong lessons in the process. Ah well, I suppose we should count our blessings that *Longlegs* wasn't called *Let Me In Now*.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

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People are always asking us how they can have their writing published in FANGORIA. Here you go!
This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required.
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LETTER NEVER SENT

Editor's note: the great Gary Pullin — @ghoulishgary online — wrote this letter to FANGORIA in 1989. He sent it last week. We're excited to publish it, with this added context from Gary:

"I was looking through some old drawings and found an unsent letter I wrote to FANGORIA when I was 16, about a teacher trying to ban *Freddy's Nightmares* and Fright Flicks cards. I think what bothered me most was this teacher was a total square while my homeroom teach was an awesome lady who fostered my horror interests, and would let me hang Freddy and *Evil Dead* drawings in her classroom around Halloween.

"This letter is basically me shaking my fist towards the clouds about censorship, and then I never had the nerve to send it. Teenage angst!"

Gary, we're happy to give you this closure. - PN

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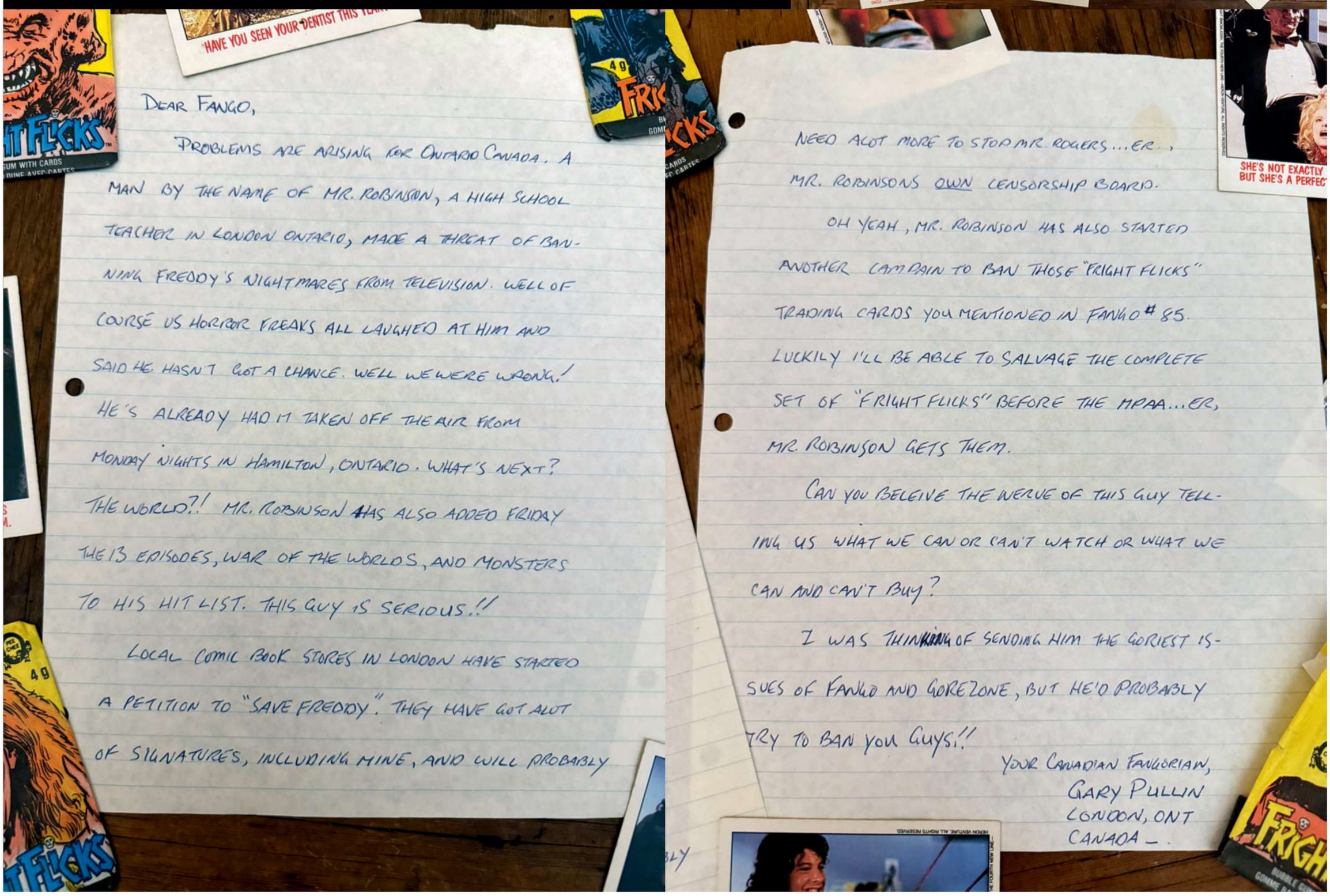

DEAR FANGO,

PROBLEMS ARE ARISING FOR ONTARIO CANADA. A MAN BY THE NAME OF MR. ROBINSON, A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER IN LONDON ONTARIO, MADE A THREAT OF BANNING FREDDY'S NIGHTMARES FROM TELEVISION. WELL OF COURSE US HORROR FREAKS ALL LAUGHED AT HIM AND SAID HE HASN'T GOT A CHANCE. WELL WE WERE WRONG! HE'S ALREADY HAD IT TAKEN OFF THE AIR FROM MONDAY NIGHTS IN HAMILTON, ONTARIO. WHAT'S NEXT? THE WORLD?! MR. ROBINSON HAS ALSO ADDED FRIDAY THE 13 EPISODES, WAR OF THE WORLDS, AND MONSTERS TO HIS HIT LIST. THIS GUY IS SERIOUS!!

LOCAL COMIC BOOK STORES IN LONDON HAVE STARTED A PETITION TO "SAVE FREDDY". THEY HAVE GOT ALOT OF SIGNATURES, INCLUDING MINE, AND WILL PROBABLY NEED ALOT MORE TO STOP MR. ROGERS...ER., MR. ROBINSONS OWN CENSORSHIP BOARD.

OH YEAH, MR. ROBINSON HAS ALSO STARTED ANOTHER CAMPAIN TO BAN THOSE "FRIGHT FLICKS" TRADING CARDS YOU MENTIONED IN FANGO # 85. LUCKILY I'LL BE ABLE TO SALVAGE THE COMPLETE SET OF "FRIGHT FLICKS" BEFORE THE MPAA...ER, MR. ROBINSON GETS THEM.

CAN YOU BELEIVE THE NERVE OF THIS GUY TELLING US WHAT WE CAN OR CAN'T WATCH OR WHAT WE CAN AND CAN'T BUY?

I WAS THINKING OF SENDING HIM THE GORIEST ISSUES OF FANGO AND GOREZONE, BUT HE'D PROBABLY TRY TO BAN YOU GUYS!!

YOUR CANADIAN FANGORIAN,
GARY PULLIN
LONDON, ONT
CANADA

MONSTER INVASION

DON'T MOVE

By Phil Nobile Jr.

A NEW SAM RAIMI-PRODUCED THRILLER FINDS YELLOWSTONE'S KELSEY ASBILLE STAVING OFF A SERIAL KILLER IN THE WILDERNESS – WHILE RENDERED COMPLETELY PARALYZED.

It's a bad idea, right?"

Kelsey Asbille is talking about her decision to take the leading role in *Don't Move*, the Sam Raimi-produced thriller from filmmakers Brian Netto and Adam Schindler that hits Netflix on October 25th.

Perhaps the first cat-and-mouse thriller in which the mouse is helplessly stuck in the trap for 75% of the movie, *Don't Move* finds Asbille's Iris as the intended victim of a serial killer in the secluded woods of Northern California. After the killer injects her with a paralyzing agent that renders her completely immobile, Iris struggles to first outrun, then outsmart and outlast her pursuer – often while being able to move nothing but her eyelids. "It was such an incredible opportunity," Asbille says, "and the whole time I was making it, I was thinking, 'Do I have enough self-confidence to be on the screen this close for the whole movie?'"

KELSEY ASBILLE AND CO-DIRECTORS ADAM SCHINDLER AND BRIAN NETTO CHOREOGRAPH ALL THE NOT MOVING OF *DON'T MOVE*.

Her doubt is understandable – though, as the film proves, wholly unfounded. Though Asbille is deprived of much of an actor's usual arsenal, she completely sells the film's peril, horror and humanity; it's an astonishing performance to behold.

"It's so different to what I've done before, and I think that right after I read the script, I met with Adam and Brian and Sam, and it was just such a wonderful conversation, and I just immediately loved them, and knew I wanted to be a part of it, because of them," she says. "It is a performance that really does depend on, or I really did lean on, the director, so you had to have so much trust between each other."

Don't Move opens with Iris at rock bottom (though, ironically, at the top of a massive cliff): she's standing on the edge of a precipice in a state park, bereft

KELSEY ASBILLE AS IRIS, UNDERSTANDING THE ASSIGNMENT TO, THAT'S RIGHT, *DON'T MOVE*.

"The whole film is a conversation she has with herself and her will to live."

- Kelsey Asbille

at the recent loss of her young son and pondering taking her own life. After being literally talked off the ledge by a kindly stranger, Iris soon finds herself in the crosshairs of a cunning serial killer who's got a rather horrifying weekend planned for her in his remote cabin – plans which, he chillingly teases, require her to be unable to move.

After he jabs her with a drug that gradually takes away her ability to walk, to speak, and finally to move, Iris is physically helpless – yet Asbille must still carry the movie, navigating not only a monumentally challenging physical performance, but a thematic arc in which her once-suicidal character must fight to survive. "The whole film is a conversation she has with herself and her will to live," Asbille says. "It's not exactly a meditation on grief, but I think that's the beauty of the genre; you can have these conversations in such a meaningful way, that also really resonates."

To prep, Asbille watched a handful of relevant performances.

"We had a lot of really great references for this movie," she says. "In terms of Iris' personal journey, we had *Run Lola Run*, *Gravity*, a bunch of things. I think a big one for Adam and Brian was *The Vanishing* from 1988. But for the paralysis, a big one was *What Lies Beneath*. That scene with Michelle Pfeiffer in the bathtub is just terrifying."

Iris' gradual paralysis follows a very specific arc in the film, and Asbille credits screenwriters T.J. Cimfel and David White (*There's Something Wrong with the Children*) for creating the necessary roadmap.

"In the script, it lays out the stages of the paralysis pretty specifically," Asbille explains. "So we went back through the script – okay, this section is this, this section it becomes that – just so that we could keep our own kind of continuity. And then there was a spontaneous aspect of it where you're figuring it out quickly on the day. It's a bit of both preparation and instinct."

In speaking to FANGORIA, Asbille seems determined to not take credit for her excellent performance, next passing the praise on to cinematographer Zach Kuperstein (*Barbarian*). "He's brilliant; the camera becomes such an important part of my character storytelling. You'll notice that its movements – or lack of movements – often mirror Iris' stages of paralysis."

Indeed, as Iris becomes immobile, so too does the camera, putting the viewer in the shoes of the paralyzed protagonist. In one particularly harrowing scene, Iris is lying next to a bustling, angry-looking ant colony, and she must lie unmoving as those ants make their way across her face. In another, an industrial mower veers ever closer to the tall grass in which she's lying helplessly. The scares are real, but subjecting a completely passive protagonist to them – and having

REST ASSURED ASBILLE DOES MOVE IN *DON'T MOVE*. THIS IS JUST A STILL. BECAUSE IT'S A MAGAZINE, SILLY.

PHOTOS BY VLADISLAV LEPOEV / COURTESY OF NETFLIX

AS A NON-JABBED-WITH-A-PARALYTIC CAST MEMBER OF *DON'T MOVE*, FINN WITTROCK GETS TO MOVE ALL HE WANTS.

her somehow react through the paralysis – is a novel approach, and a challenge not lost on the actress.

"I think that was, to Adam and Brian's credit, something that I really trusted them with. They're on the monitor and I have to trust – 'Okay, does this work? Does this read? Is this enough?' Because there is obviously such an internal life going on underneath the paralysis. I really had to lean so much on Adam and Brian, because there is a pretty large technical aspect of how the paralysis translates on camera."

The other big challenge is being an unresponsive scene partner to a variety of co-stars (including Finn Wittrock, Moray Treadwell and Daniel Francis), though the actress downplays her achievement here as well. "You become a really good listener," Asbille laughs. "That's all you can do, really. I just get to sit back and watch all my great partners do their thing."

And, like any genre fan would be, Asbille was excited to be working with the great Sam Raimi (who produced alongside Zainab Azizi). "I was so starstruck on Zoom, I could barely, barely speak," Asbille shares. "But he was just so incredibly generous. He was out in Bulgaria with us, and I think no matter what his role is – producer, director, or writer – he really makes movies with all his heart. He still has this childlike wonder after all these years; he really loves making movies. That's so infectious, and he was such a mentor to all of us." The actress geeked out especially hard upon overhearing "Sam talking to the crew about the right color of blood."

It's only fair to note – and this is not exactly a spoiler – that Iris is not paralyzed for the entire movie, and when she isn't, Asbille is tasked with physical action that's on par with anything Bruce Campbell ever did for Raimi. "I was tumbling down a hill and trying to figure out the mechanics of it. It was all very precise, and really challenging."

Those scenes packaged an extra punch for the actress, for personal reasons. "I think that was the most rewarding part for me personally, because I had a really bad accident several years ago and had a back injury. And I think it wasn't until I was tumbling around the forests of Bulgaria that I realized how precious I had become with my own body," she says. "So I think in that way it was a journey for me personally of just kind of getting back into my own body. And it was also just so much fun. We had such a great stunt team, and I felt like a little kid again."

ASBILLE AND CREW CAPTURE A PRECARIOUS EARLY MOMENT OF THE FILM.

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ELEGIES

FANGO INTERN MADE GOOD PART TWO

CONTINUING OUR CONVERSATION WITH FILM EDITOR FRED RASKIN.

PHOTOS: (LEFT) BY WILLIAM STETZ • (RIGHT) COURTESY FRED RASKIN

A frustrated Phil Nobile Jr., FANGORIA's usually even-keeled editor, just read me the riot act. "The magazine is a finite space!" he reminded me. Being a former Fango editor, I should have known that the mag could not squeeze my 3,000-word column into a two-page spread that could only accommodate for 800 words...

So, just like Quentin Tarantino had to split up his massive *Kill Bill* revenge epic into two parts, my interview with Fango-intern-turned-Tarantino-editor Fred Raskin ran so long, I had to divide it into two Elegies! Wait, make that *three*!

Welcome back, Fred!

Do you recall the first assignment you gave me? It was to transcribe an interview that you had done with an up-and-coming filmmaker named Quentin Tarantino [*laughs*]. You got him talking about his plans for what was going to be *Halloween 6*, the one that he and Scott Spiegel were going to do together.

What were you expecting from that 1994 Fango internship?

I really had no idea. I was just such a huge Fango fan and of the work that you and [managing editor] Mike Gingold were doing. Beyond that first interview transcription, this was my introduction to copy editing, which actually played very well into my skill sets. You taught me the ins and outs of copy editing and then captioning photographs. The highlight was writing [a cover line] for *The Stand* [#132]. I made the cover with, "Smile! The World Is Ending" because you had a grinning corpse picture. That was me!

You also notoriously reviewed an early screening of *Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers* for us. Did that come up when you worked for Dimension?

Yes, but not in that way. When I first got to LA, it was pretty challenging for somebody who didn't really have many connections. To network, you would go around to the handful of editing facilities, knock on a door, introduce yourself and give your résumé out. So, one of those doors was for the *Hellraiser: Bloodline* cutting room. They saw Fango on my résumé and asked what I did there. I mentioned I did copy editing, wrote captions, and I had reviewed one movie.

They asked, 'Well, which one?' '*Halloween 6*,' I replied.

It was the movie's editor who I was talking to, and he said, 'We have friends who worked on *Halloween 6*.' And this is when I realized, 'Oh, no, the director of *Hellraiser IV* had been replaced by the director of *Halloween 6*.' Then the editor told me, 'Maybe we'll just trash your résumé the way you trashed our friend's movie.' Having been in LA for two weeks, I was quite convinced that was the end of my career [*laughs*].

How did you first meet Tarantino's editor, Sally Menke?

I was recommended to Sally by Tatiana Riegel, whom I'd worked with on *Hurlyburly*. She had been Sally's first assistant on *Pulp Fiction*. Sally hired me to go on location for Billy Bob Thornton's *Daddy and Them* as second assistant editor. Later, she brought me back as second assistant editor on the *Kill Bill* movies.

WHAT A BUNCH OF A-HOLES. EDITOR FRED RASKIN (RIGHT) SITS BY DIRECTOR JAMES GUNN AND VARIOUS *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*.

What do you recall about the first time you met Tarantino?

That was on *Kill Bill*. The movie ran way overschedule. It was supposed to be a three-and-a-half-month shoot, but it ultimately ended up taking about eight months. I didn't meet Quentin until he came back. I had been working on it for a long time. Joan Sobel and I were cutting sound effects for Sally, many of which made it into the finished movie. He came into the editing room and was very happy to meet everyone. One day we all ordered lunch together from In-N-Out Burger. I keep kosher; I can't do hamburgers. So, I had our PA go to McDonald's and get me a Filet-o-Fish. And Quentin said, 'I've always wondered, who orders the Filet-o-Fish?' I said, 'The guy who keeps kosher!' He says, 'There's nothing else at McDonald's you can eat?' I was like, 'No, you have to go to a McDonald's in Israel if you want a kosher burger.' And he was like, 'What do they call a Big Mac there?' And I was like, 'Are we really having this conversation?' [*laughs*] That's my earliest recollection of talking with Quentin.

What did your second assistant editor job entail on the two *Kill Bills*?

Some standard stuff like getting the dailies prepped for the editor, laying out all of her bins so that when she looks at the way the footage is laid out, she can understand how it's supposed to go together. Plus, whenever Sally Menke would finish a scene, she would toss it our way and have us add all of the sound effects. It was exciting that our stuff not only made it into the editor's assembly, but also the finished movie. One critic specifically mentioned the way Uma's hair swishes in the wind in *Vol. 2* [*laughs*]. I was like, 'Yeah, that's something I cut.'

Whenever they would finish a scene, they would bring us in and get our thoughts. Quentin later told me part of why he hired me to be his editor is because when they did those screenings, I was pretty vocal about my thoughts. Not just what I thought worked, but also anything I had problems with. He said, 'I appreciate your honesty. I really value that.'

SEQUEL RITES

WHEN FRANCHISES LOSE THEIR MAGIC.

"Please don't suck," my friend said quietly as the lights went down for an advance screening of *Alien: Romulus* this past August. And I have to say that I somewhat shared his trepidation. Not because there was any specific reason for us to expect *Romulus* to suck; it was in the more-than-capable hands of Fede Álvarez, who proved with the *Evil Dead* remake that he could properly honor the tone and terror of a past genre classic.

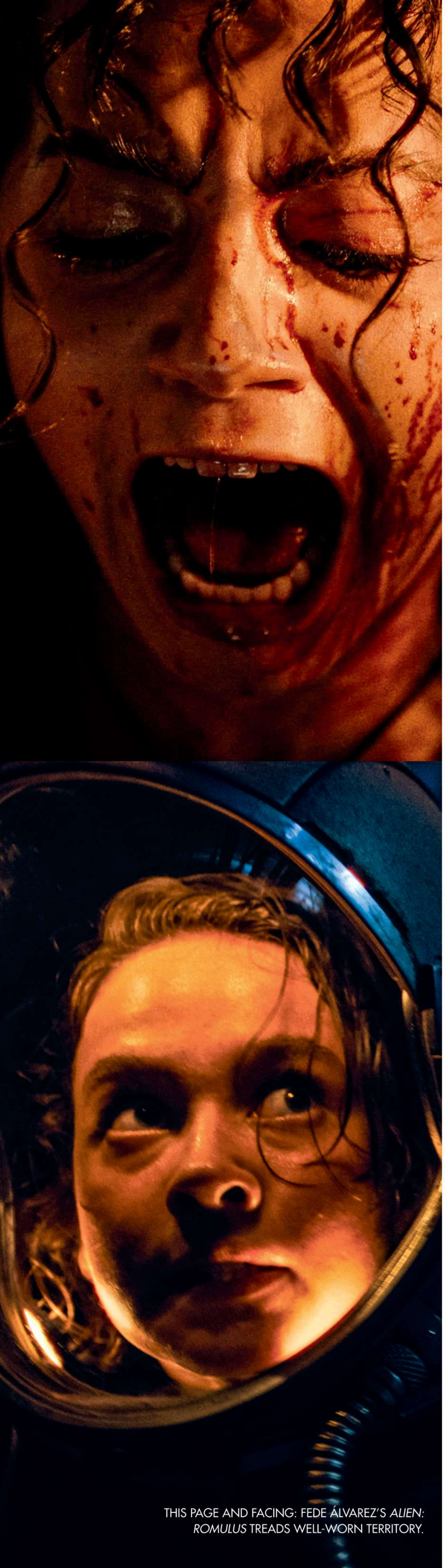
Rather, it had to do with the proliferation of film follow-ups in the last decade or so, many of them failing to live up to their originals (or prior franchise installments). And also, in my case, a touch of exhaustion with the *Alien* series overall. Certainly younger fans, for whom *Romulus* was their first or second new *Alien* movie in a theater, might have a different reaction. But I'm old enough to have seen the first *Alien* on the big screen at the formative age of 12, and my and my pal's apprehension about *Romulus* was in stark contrast to my breathless anticipation when *Aliens* came out back in 1986. The promise of *The Terminator*'s James Cameron at the helm was exciting, the reviews were largely stellar, and I and the rest of the crowd at an opening-weekend showing were buzzing with excitement. The movie, of course, delivered and then some.

But then came *Alien3* and *Alien: Resurrection*, neither of which recaptured the fire and fear of the original duo. The long-awaited *Alien vs. Predator* was a PG-13 misfire, and its sequel *Aliens vs. Predator – Requiem*, though a hard R, was a bust as a movie. Original *Alien* director Ridley Scott's return to the milieu with *Prometheus* was divisive because it dared to introduce new mythology, though I found quite a bit to admire in it, while his subsequent *Alien: Covenant* fell well short of his '79 classic. And my reaction to *Romulus* was that Álvarez and co. came up with a well-crafted, sometimes quite scary film that is ultimately too dependent on calling back to its predecessors.

I don't know about anyone else, but at this point, I don't need any more *Alien* movies. We've got the first two, which both warrant and reward repeat viewings and together tell a perfectly contained story. By now – and certainly based on the evidence thus far – filmmakers would be hard-pressed to continue the franchise without simply rehashing what has already been done. And advance interviews about next year's FX/Hulu *Alien* series indicate that it will also hark back, once again, to the '79 feature.

My feelings in this area extend beyond the Xenomorph saga to another 20th Century Fox space adventure. I was 10 years old – the perfect age – when *Star Wars* first made the screen scene, and it ignited my imagination like no movie had before. The three-year wait for *The Empire Strikes Back*, followed by another for *Return of the Jedi*, only added to the excitement of finally getting to see them when they landed in movie houses. But today, after two more trilogies and a pair of spinoff films, plus a dozen or so series, for me, some of the magic is gone. The thrill of the buildup to that next release date and the satisfaction (or not) of seeing that much-awaited new installment can't be duplicated when there's so much *Star Wars* available at the click of a remote.

PHOTOS COURTESY 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS



THIS PAGE AND FACING: FEDE ÁLVAREZ'S *ALIEN: ROMULUS* TREADS WELL-WORN TERRITORY.

And the same thing has happened, sadly, with my favorite horror film of all time. I've written before about how the wonderfully terrifying experience of witnessing the first *Halloween* turned me toward a lifetime of loving scary cinema, and how catching *Halloween II* on its namesake night in 1981 – my first R-rated movie without an accompanying parent or adult guardian – still stands as one of my all-time favorite filmgoing experiences. Back then, seeing *Halloween II* wasn't a dutiful trip to the latest series entry, but truly exciting for those of us who loved John Carpenter's slasher breakout. We were getting more *Halloween*! And I was one fan who, primed and pre-informed by FANGORIA's coverage, was ready for and appreciated *Halloween III: Season of the Witch*'s turn away from Michael Myers to a fresh All Hallow's terror tale.

Then Michael Myers came home again, and again, and the bloom faded from that rose. A string of (if you ask me, anyway) lousy sequels, broken only by the still-underrated *Halloween: H20*, succeeded only in dissipating the eerie spell Michael cast in his maiden voyage. The first David Gordon Green entry had its qualities, but frankly, I found the years-later characterization of Laurie Strode more convincing and compelling in *H20*. *Halloween Kills* wallowed in unpleasant sadism and *Halloween Ends*, paradoxically, did try to do something different with the material, but the new storyline felt forced and implausible and distracted from the ostensible endgame of showcasing Laurie's final reckoning with Michael. Last October, Miramax announced its acquisition of the rights to *Halloween*, with plans to launch a film and TV "cinematic universe." I will forever hold Carpenter's classic close to my heart, but it is my sincere belief that there is nothing more to be done with *Halloween*. If they never make another sequel or spinoff or "reimagining" again, that'll be fine by me.

I should hasten to add that I don't feel this way about all sequels, necessarily; there are still some that can have me hankering for their arrival. As I write this, the release of *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* is a few weeks away, and the reunion of Tim Burton and almost the entire cast of the beloved original has me seriously hyped up. While it seems like the possession subgenre emptied its bag of tricks years ago, I'm super-curious to see what Mike Flanagan brings to his forthcoming *Exorcist* opus. And every so often, one comes along that subverts low expectations like last year's surprisingly good *Saw X*, or fulfills its initial promise like this past summer's *A Quiet Place: Day One*. I also enjoyed both of Radio Silence's *Scream* follow-ups – but I would have been happy to trade those for a couple more stand-alone scare films from that team like *Ready or Not* and *Abigail*.

As always, however, money shrieks, and neither *Ready or Not* nor *Abigail* made as much in their entire domestic runs as either of the latest *Screams* did in their opening weekends. One reason I believe sequels could feel more exciting in decades past is that there weren't so damn many of them, in all genres. It's funny to look back at Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert decrying sequelitis in their review shows from the '80s; one can imagine how dismayed they'd be over summer 2024, in which it seemed like franchise features were all we got. As I left the *Alien: Romulus* screening, every poster I passed on the way to the lobby was hawking a sequel – and there were a lot of them. It's certainly hard to argue with the financial incentive; as of this writing, 2024's top 10 box-office films – and all but two that had made over $100 million – were number twos or fours or whatever entry in a popular cycle.

So sequels are giving the people what they apparently want – or, at least, are offering known quantities that don't seem like as much of a risk given the ever-rising costs of tickets and concessions. But were people as excited to see, say, *Twisters* or *Bad Boys: Ride or Die* as me and my friends were to catch *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* or *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* back in the day? I don't necessarily get that sense. And while a number of original horror films underperformed this year, the fact that *Late Night with the Devil* became an indie hit and *Longlegs* did major numbers is heartening evidence that the shock of the new can still be a draw. One thing's for sure: It's unlikely that people lured in by *Longlegs*' creepily creative marketing campaign sat down in their theater seats saying, "Please don't suck."

SceneQueen

Taking A Big BITE

BARBARA TEAMS UP WITH THE DUO BEHIND ONEFOX PRODUCTIONS FOR THEIR LATEST, *LITTLE BITES*.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

JON SKLAROFF (CENTER) PLAYS AGYAR, FLANKED ON THE LEFT BY PRODUCER, EDITOR AND STAR KRSY FOX AND ON THE RIGHT BY CO-STAR ELIZABETH PHOENIX CARO.

Occasionally I use my column to highlight friends who are doing cool things and continue to be passionate and productive while going up against the odds of making a movie. We've had a couple of tough years, and some have been disheartened about working in the indie film world. But then you have people like Chris Nash who helmed *In a Violent Nature*, and Damian Mc Carthy who wrote and directed *Oddity*. Then there are Zelda Adams, John Adams and Toby Poser, who make films their own way and have for years, like with *Hellbender*, which got the directors a lot of attention. Now there's a new duo in town who have been quietly making movies for a few years. Trust me when I tell you they are about to make a big splash with their latest. The film is called *Little Bites*, and it premiered at this year's Fantastic Fest in Austin. Filmmakers Spider One and Krsy Fox formed OneFox Productions to make groundbreaking indie horror.

THE AUTHOR CHATS WITH FOX AND WRITER/DIRECTOR SPIDER ONE.

Krsy and Spider have masterfully forged their own way. They made *Bury the Bride* on a small budget and sold it for a profit on Tubi at a time when a lot of indie filmmakers were afraid to make anything. Spider is the writer and director of the duo. Krsy is the star in front of the camera and behind. She taught herself how to edit, and she perfects the color, sound and music. Both have a music background. Spider has been the frontman for Powerman 5000 for 35 years. Krsy writes music and sings and has written several number one radio hits for bands over the years, as well as fronting her own group, Knee High Fox. I guess you could say being creative is in their bones. (Incidentally, Spider is Rob Zombie's younger brother.)

I first met Spider and Krsy when a company I used to work with was helping them distribute their first film, *Frank*, about sisterhood and a dark depression that takes the form of a horrific monster. I remember thinking what a striking couple they made. We became fast friends as their kind energy and openness are something I really admire and look for in people I spend time with.

Their latest release, *Little Bites*, is about the creation of a child and what the care and love for another tiny soul does to you. Depending on your circumstances, being a parent can sometimes feel like it's you against the world. What people think about how you parent can create monstrous feelings toward society and yourself when you feel that you don't measure up. The duo asked me to play a part in the movie along with our other friends Bonnie Aarons, Heather Langenkamp, Mark Kelly and Chaz Bono (whose mother, Cher, produced).

Witnessing how they pulled the whole thing together in a few months was eye-opening and miraculous. They do everything: casting, contracts, costumes, budget, line producing, and all post-production. Yes, friends, this is what you have to do if a door isn't open for you and you want to manifest your destiny: do it all yourself and figure out a way to make it happen without asking for help or permission.

This can-do attitude is infectious and inspiring. Krsy and Spider are pure artists, visualizing an artform and taking all the steps in between to make it happen. Everyone I know is in a kind of awe of them. The way they do things looks effortless, even though I know how hard they work. When you're a pure creative, I think you look for ways to wade through all the reasons you might not do something and instead, you just do it. That may mean tackling every part of production until you have the means not to. It means telling yourself "yes" at every crossroad and then figuring out a way to get it done. With their newest film about to debut, they also just wrapped principal photography on their latest, *Big Baby*. While filming a pool scene at my house, they enlisted a mutual friend to production manage, who asked, "How are they doing this, Barbara?" I said, "They are simply a magical force!"

Krsy says of her love for the work, "When COVID hit and it was apparent music and touring just weren't an option, Spider and I decided this was our moment. We had always wanted to make our own films and had both directed a ton of music videos. In the last four years we have made six feature films and three shorts. We realized we didn't need permission from anyone; in fact we didn't really need anything. Just hard work, a great team, the right talent and everything else we could do ourselves. We also got to bring on some big EPs like Cher! It's been a whirlwind, but the thing I always really stress to all of my friends or people who ask how to make movies like we do, just be prepared to work harder than you ever have in your life. Surround yourselves with talented crew and actors, and love every minute of it, learn every job. We make fucking movies for a living! It's insane, it's the creative dream, and if you're not having fun then what's the point?"

Spider adds, "For me, the desire to create and not just sit on the sidelines as a fan has been something that has been in me since childhood. When I was a little kid I loved collecting comic books but that wasn't enough. I needed to write and draw my own. As a teenager, I loved music, but listening wasn't enough, so I started a band. The same was true of my love of film. I need to make them, not just watch. I like to say that I learned everything I need to succeed from punk rock. Meaning that, there are no open doors, there are no shortcuts, there is no help. If you want to do something you have to do it yourself and, by screaming as loud as you can, force people to take notice."

Being an artist means saying yes and often. Taking a big bite out of life and creativity. Don't get in your own way and figure out a way to make things happen. Most of all, be inspired by yourself and others around you.

PRODUCTION STILLS: ANDY PATCH • BTS IMAGES: DI

Stephen Graham Jones'

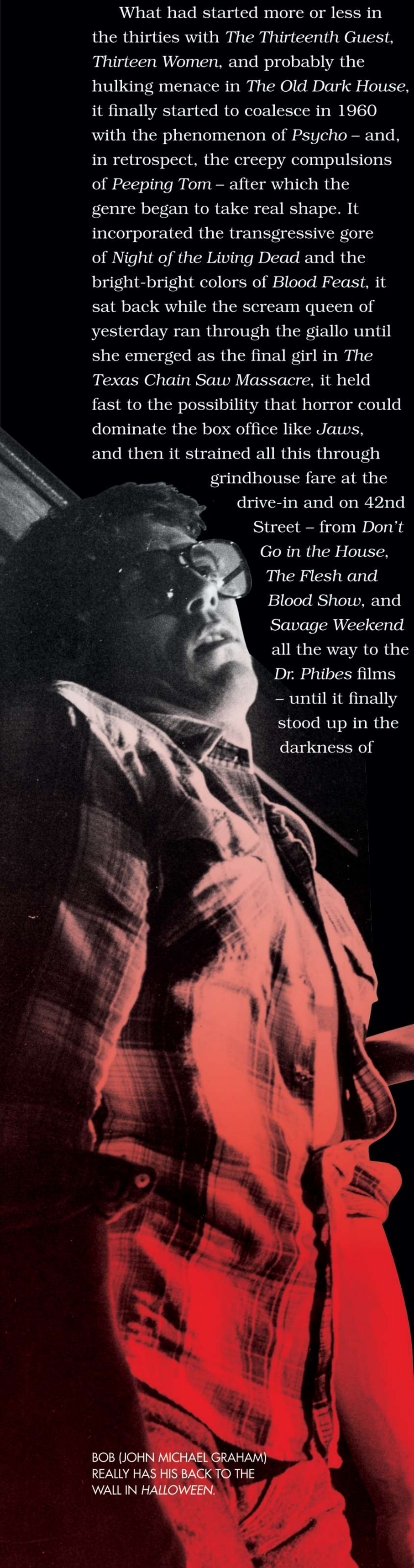
SLASHER NATION

WE ARE ABANDONED

HEY NOW – THE DREAM IS OVER.

Until 1978, when John Carpenter and Debra Hill nailed the slasher conventions *and* their progression to the wall with *Halloween* – nailed them to the wall along with Bob – this burgeoning genre was random body parts in need of an organizing principle. A lumbering monster was probably there, you could see how all this might puzzle together, but it still needed some delicate assembly.

What had started more or less in the thirties with *The Thirteenth Guest*, *Thirteen Women*, and probably the hulking menace in *The Old Dark House*, it finally started to coalesce in 1960 with the phenomenon of *Psycho* – and, in retrospect, the creepy compulsions of *Peeping Tom* – after which the genre began to take real shape. It incorporated the transgressive gore of *Night of the Living Dead* and the bright-bright colors of *Blood Feast*, it sat back while the scream queen of yesterday ran through the giallo until she emerged as the final girl in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, it held fast to the possibility that horror could dominate the box office like *Jaws*, and then it strained all this through grindhouse fare at the drive-in and on 42nd Street – from *Don't Go in the House*, *The Flesh and Blood Show*, and *Savage Weekend* all the way to the *Dr. Phibes* films – until it finally stood up in the darkness of a grimy movie theater as Bob Clark's *Black Christmas*, which had everything the slasher needed, except… while wonderful and amazing, terrifying and prescient, a model for all slashers, *Black Christmas* didn't make as much money as *Halloween* shortly would.



BOB (JOHN MICHAEL GRAHAM) REALLY HAS HIS BACK TO THE WALL IN *HALLOWEEN*.

THIS PAGE AND FACING: IN *FRIDAY THE 13TH*, ALICE (ADRIENNE KING) DREAMS A DREAM, AND THE SLASHER IS CHANGED FOREVER.

We're not wrong to say that the Golden Age of the slasher starts there, in 1978, with that score, that Steadicam, that mask. But, remember, we say this with the benefit of distance. In its day, *Halloween*, while not quite in the cycle of prestige horror circulating at the time (*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*), was sort of adjacent to them: a young filmmaker with an eye for composition and framing, completely in control of his craft, "elevating" the drive-in to something approaching respectability, thanks in no small part to Debra Hill's babysitters being so authentic, not just carving dummies. Talent like that being rare, teams like Hill and Carpenter rarer still, *Halloween* didn't so much grandly kick off this first slasher boom as provide a brass ring for other filmmakers to try to grab.

Who wouldn't want some of that low-budget/high-returns alchemy – never mind the artistry that made *Halloween* exceptional. Just, maybe distill it down to "teenagers dying in increasingly gory ways over a single night," and… shouldn't that be good enough to sell some tickets?

I'm talking about Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th*, here. Go back, watch the 1980 TV spot for it, where the main thing it promises isn't dread or menace, but a countdown of shocking deaths. And? Cunningham's big gamble, promoting the film when all he had was a title in need of investors, it paid off, and it kept paying off in that summer of 1980. Yes, *Halloween* scared the audience in a way that came home, but *Friday the 13th* – specifically, Tom Savini's *Carrie*-stinger of an ending – thrilled the people sitting in the theater, thrilled them enough that they kept coming back all summer, and *bringing friends*, just to watch them shriek when kid-Jason rises up from the water to drag Alice from that iconic canoe.

It's one of the best jumpscares the slasher has.

This, to me, is where the Golden Age actually begins. It's not because of that seminal jumpscare or the repeat viewing or the box-office haul, though, but because *this ending is a dream.*

I submit that the rest of this first slasher boom sort of happens *within* this dream. It's a magical space where wrongs are righted. It's a fantasy world that's brutally fair. It's where all our feelings are, like high school, so melodramatic, both simpled down for mass consumption and amplified so we can't miss them. And Wes Craven, with 1984's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, was, I think, either dramatizing this via Freddy Krueger and his haunted dreamscapes, or answering and giving form to the genre's (im)pulse that he, Craven, had his thumb directly on.

The Golden Age was a wonderful, bloody dream of a time. Until the

IN *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, HANNIBAL LECTER (ANTHONY HOPKINS) FIRST WEARS A JASON MASK, THEN A SGT. PEMBRY MASK.

weight of its own sequels and familiarity with the formula finally caused it to stagger, fall down such that, for a while, serial killer thrillers replaced Jason and Freddy, Michael and Chucky.

But then came *Scream* in 1996, yes. Which we all know – my point isn't that Kevin Williamson and Wes Craven fundamentally reinvigorated the slasher, using *Just Before Dawn*'s surprise second killer, killing off the putative lead, weaponizing our own Slasher Q against us ("Casey" and "Sidney" and "Tatum" are all names that, like Ripley, aren't gender-specific).

My point is that, all through the eighties, we'd been dreaming a long and wonderful slasher dream, until we opened our eyes to the awkwardness of Hannibal Lecter wearing Leatherface's mask. It felt slashery, sure, but… this wasn't the slasher we knew and loved, that we'd all, in our own canoes, been dreaming. So, we did what you do: closed our eyes again, not opening them until 1996.

What we saw was what *The Cabin in the Wood*'s Ancient Ones (um: us) had been dreaming all along: a teenybopper being stalked and slashed.

But, pay attention to what these two Ghostfaces (listen close, it is both Billy and Stu) and Casey are leading us through over the phone. They go from *Death Wish* – "revenge" doesn't start in 1974 with Charles Bronson, but that is sort of a flashpoint – to *Halloween* to *Friday the 13th*. We're being traipsed up from the Petri dish of the pre–*Halloween* seventies and then down through the Golden Age, and in order!

But, then?

Then this movie star, much like Marion Crane in *Psycho*, she somehow dies, unsettling what we thought we could expect. And, oddly enough, Casey Becker, she lives, or lived, in a world that… also has a slasher shelf? She, like us, actually knows the rules of this violent game, even if she doesn't quite pass the big test?

Things were changing under Casey's feet, right before our eyes.

This horror story wasn't happening in a world that doesn't know *Black Christmas*, this was happening in a world intimately familiar with all the variations of Billy, up there gibbering in the attic. This was happening in our world. And that, for all the glibness and comedy and slapstick-to-come, was chilling.

Wes Craven, then, being Wes Craven, even visually signals this for us, in case we're too scared to put it together ourselves: after Casey's dead, when she's strung up in front of her parents' house, the angle Craven uses is the reverse of a shot that happens a minute in, where we're looking through the ropes of a long-unused swing hanging from a tree.

Long unused since childhood, that "childhood" being ours, deep in the Golden Age.

So, the opening of *Scream* is that childhood, but then, when Casey's eviscerated on and wound in the ropes of that swing… childhood's over, y'all. Those ropes may as well be iridescent videotape ripped straight from the Golden Age.

This is something new, something real – it could happen to us.

The blood-soaked dream that started with *Friday the 13th*, it lasts a probably not accidental thirteen minutes into this new slasher, but, now?

Now the popcorn, it's burning on the stove.

The dream is over.

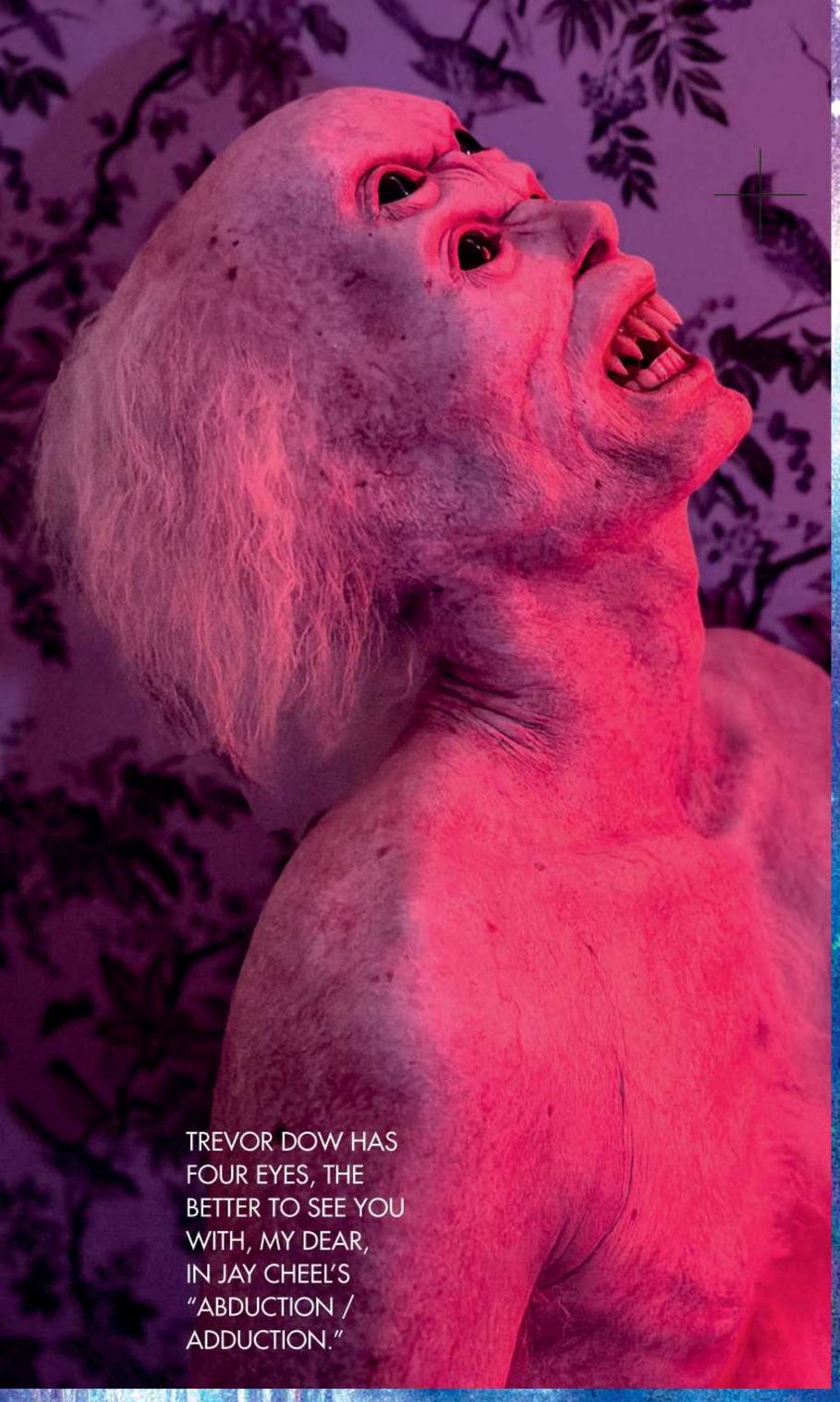
Welcome to the waking world, the one slasher movies are supposed to be an escape from.

Stay alive in it, if you can. 💀

IT'S TOO BAD FOR CASEY (DREW BARRYMORE) THAT DO NOT DISTURB WASN'T INVENTED BY 1996'S *SCREAM*.

BY
KALYN CORRIGAN

PATRICK MAGEE GOES BEYOND IN LATEST V/H/S INSTALLMENT



TREVOR DOW HAS FOUR EYES, THE BETTER TO SEE YOU WITH, MY DEAR, IN JAY CHEEL'S "ABDUCTION / ADDUCTION."

RHETT WELLINGTON MAY NOT GET AHEAD, BUT HE IS A HEAD IN JUSTIN MARTINEZ'S "LIVE AND LET DIVE."

THE VFX PRO RETURNS TO THE BELOVED HORROR ANTHOLOGY FRANCHISE TO WORK HIS MAGIC.

"That's the ultimate movie magic illusion, is what we do, I think," Patrick Magee tells me as we sit down to talk about his work on *V/H/S/Beyond*. Magee, a renowned special makeup and effects artist with over two decades of experience in the film industry, has become a household name in the popular *V/H/S* anthology series. Ever since a last-minute invitation to work on Chloe Okuno's "Storm Drain" segment in *V/H/S/94* resulted in his Raatma creature blowing up online, inciting fans to "Hail Raatma!" far and wide, Magee has been asked back for every sequel. As the through-line in a franchise that loves to alter its lineup, Magee's becoming a staple is both an honor and a great challenge, especially in the upcoming *Beyond*, in which the artist boasts his superior effects work on five out of the six total segments.

Featuring six new tapes, the seventh installment is sci-fi-inspired and includes some exciting new names contributing segments. Kate Siegel of *The House of the Fall of Usher* fame is making her directorial debut with "Stowaway," which is co-written by her husband and frequent collaborator Mike Flanagan. Brothers Justin and Christian Long co-direct "Fur Babies," a caricatured entry that feels like if John Landis made *The Human Centipede*. Virat Pal dredges up a dangerous "Dream Girl," and Jordan Downey delivers a dark take on a children's

FRIEND OF FANGO DANE DILIEGRO STANDS IN STORK CONTRAST IN JORDAN DOWNEY'S "STORK."

classic bedtime fable with "Stork." Jay Cheel provides a special presentation for the wraparound "Abduction, Adduction," and Justin Martinez seizes an opportunity to show off his impressive VFX skills with "Live and Let Dive," marking his return to the series after "10/31/98," which he made with the rest of Radio Silence for the very first *V/H/S* film.

"Everyone's trying to outdo the other one," says Magee about working with so many directors at once. "Which is fantastic, because it makes better short films. They all want a shit ton of stuff. I feel like I'm just getting beat up at this point." Laughing, Magee looks exhausted, but grateful. He's quick to point out how interesting it is to navigate the filmmakers' different styles and cater to their unique visions. "Justin Martinez is very VFX savvy, and then you got Justin Long, who's an actor directing his brother. Some, like Jordan Downey, for example – he was really well-versed in the world of *V/H/S* and the found footage style."

Basing a franchise around a non-traditional filmmaking style like found footage means dealing with hyper specific peaks and valleys. "Typically with effects, you're going to do insert shots, and you can cheat with camera angles and cuts," explains Magee.

ALANAH PEARCE SHOWS SOME GROWTH IN KATE SIEGEL'S "STOWAWAY."

BRAEDYN BRUNER IS JAW-DROPPING IN JUSTIN AND CHRISTIAN LONG'S "FUR BABIES."

"It's really darn hard in this format, because you don't have that option." For some *Beyond* directors, this information comes as no surprise. For others, it's been more of a learning curve. In Magee's case, it means creating creatures that can be filmed from all sides, and finding innovative ways to birth greatness out of necessity.

In Downey's "Stork," a group of police officers raid an abandoned establishment which they believe houses an alleged kidnapper and a dozen or so infants taken hostage. The sequence boasts the "biggest build" in the bunch, a nine-foot-tall stork monstrosity that took eight weeks and five hundred pounds of clay to make. "The final creature is a really big creature, and it's got this long neck," Magee recalls. "The practicality of it was like, 'You don't have enough time and money for me to make a mechanical neck device, like a big dinosaur movie, and have it internally move and be a free roaming thing.' There weren't enough resources for that. So then, it was like, 'Well, it shoots in the attic. Can we build a little deck above the performer and behind and they're blacked out?' And then we literally had the head on a rod. It's '80s style, like *Evil Dead II*."

One of the obstacles faced in Kate Siegel's "Stowaway" provided the space to create one of Magee's proudest

PHOTOS COURTESY SHUDDER

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: FACIAL PEELS CAN HAVE MIXED RESULTS IN "LIVE AND LET DIVE"; TREVOR WRIGHT AND WILLIAM GRANILLO PLAY PIGGYBACK IN "FUR BABIES"; DO WORRY, BABY, IN "STORK"; CHRIS PAGE GETS A TASTE OF STARDOM IN "STORK."

achievements in the movie. In the segment, a young woman camps out at various UFO hotspots over the course of a week and inadvertently becomes trapped inside an alien vessel, where she gains firsthand experience in the effects of lightspeed on the human body. When the ship takes off, her face appears as if it's been through a fruit slicer. "We molded the actress, and then we also scanned her head," says Magee. "Then we digitally sculpted it in ZBrush. The multiple faces give you this glitch effect because it's supposed to show extreme turbulence and vibration." The result is so convincing, it looks more like VFX than shop work. "I think most everyone that looks at that is going to think that's a visual effect, or a CGI effect, when it's literally just our prop head barely moving. It looks like you have this row of vibrations of multiple faces," Magee smiles. "It's really cool, like an optical illusion done practically."

Far at the other end of the spectrum is Justin and Christian Long's "Fur Babies," a story about a suburban woman who gives her pets a little too much motherly love. "Justin has that history with *Tusk* and being transformed," relays Magee. "He was very inspired by that, and I think really wanted to lean that way." In the story, an animal rights group seeks to educate a local YouTuber about her taxidermy practices. Posing as pet owners looking to join her homebound daycare for dogs, they sneak in a tiny camera to film their confrontation. Little do they know, this taxidermist's hobby includes a wide array of specimens, one that extends all the way to human beings. "We were incorporating stitching and taxidermy and that whole kind of thing," Magee remembers. "I think originally, it was leaning more scientific as far as what the creations were. But I don't know if that felt practical for the circumstances and the dog owner. Like I don't know if she'd be that technically savvy. So I was like, 'How about she's just crudely making these horrendous things, but she thinks they're beautiful, and that's part of the dark humor of it all?'"

Justin Martinez's "Live and Let Dive" provides the perfect example of blending visual and practical effects. Being a VFX wizard himself, the director designed and created his own alien completely out of CGI, and asked Magee to cover all of the damage that creature would cause. A real standout piece of body trauma is when a character's head is decapitated by his own parachute during his fall from a plane. To achieve this, Magee made an interesting lifecast in which he molded an actor with his mouth and eyes open, and even "put a stand behind him and ran rope through his mouth and had it pulled tight on his cheeks and skin to simulate" his head being held up by the parachute ropes.

Despite all of the insane alchemy Magee pulls off in *V/H/S/Beyond*, his personal favorite piece is probably the more traditional four-eyed alien in Jay Cheel's mockumentary-style wraparound segment. "He's just a creepy character," Magee grins. "Hopefully people are creeped out by him." 💀

Nightmares Comin' True:

PHANTOM of the PARADISE at 50

By Travis Woods

Singing.

Screaming.

Both at once, one indistinguishable from the other.

A small blond man strides upon the stage, and his audience — some old, some young, some face-painted, some with hair hued shades nonexistent in nature — sings and screams in unison as if a thrumhummed jolt of rhythmic electricity has lightning bolted through their bodies, a roar pitched somewhere between rock concert and religious ecstasy, shocked that this moment is actually happening, a kind of Technicolor Bruegel come to frenzied life. The small blond man — rock legend, producer, Svengali, star — smiles as this theater becomes the ultimate rock palace… or Paradise.

It's easy to assume this is a scene from *Phantom of the Paradise*, Brian De Palma's 1974 masterpiece of musical megatonia set primarily in a "haunted" concert hall, a blisteringly angry-funny rock 'n rolled horror fable about the queasy, soul-shattering symbiosis between art and commerce, and a savage industry satire that is eternally underrated even when it is (justifiably) ranked as one of the best films of the De Palma filmography, of the 1970s, of the 20th century.

But this isn't a movie.

This is 2024:

Paul Williams, who starred as *Phantom*'s malignant and diminutive villain, the record producer/Paradise owner Swan (he also composed *Phantom*'s woozy doom-pop soundtrack), walks across the Vidiots movie theater stage in Los Angeles on this warm May evening for a Q&A with members of the film's cast and crew after a joyously rowdy screening. They, and this capacity crowd of fevered *Phantom* fans, friends, and fiends, are here to celebrate its 50th anniversary. The night is part of a series of *Phantom* anniversary screenings organized by Pressman Films and producer Sam Pressman (son of the late Edward Pressman, who produced De Palma's 1972 Hitch-shocker *Sisters* and *Phantom* back-to-back). It's akin to a rock reunion tour, snaking from Austin to a FANGORIA-presented Overlook Film Festival screening in New Orleans to this evening at LA's Vidiots; later, *Phantom* will close out the Cannes Film Festival with an outdoor beach viewing. The tour will resume in the fall and include an October showing at the Texas Majestic in Dallas (where most of the actual Paradise's interiors were shot), and climax with a trio of showings in Winnipeg, which, aside from Paris, was the only city in which *Phantom of the Paradise* was financially successful during its dismal original run 50 years ago in 1974 (discussed in depth in Fango Vol. 2, #6).

50 years.

We've had 50 years of exploring, learning, and writing about this bizarre film that was borne of rage and heartbreak: in 1972, after directing a series of scathingly satirical indie comedies skewering American politics and culture, De Palma was hired by Warner Bros. to make the comedy *Get To Know Your Rabbit*, his first big studio film. At production's end, WB balked at De Palma's style-*is*-substance approach, fired him, re-shot sequences, re-edited the entire film, and released it as a trifling mediocrity. After being fired, De Palma was stuck in an elevator with a horrific Muzak version of The Beatles' epic of death and loss, "A Day in the Life." His termination, and hearing the soundtrack to his generation's cultural revolution reduced to literal elevator music, drove him to craft a mercilessly cruel vision of a once-guerilla artist neutered into commercial plasticity.

We've had 50 years of watching, listening, and reckoning with the juicy fruits of De Palma's irradiated rage: *Phantom of the Paradise*, a scorched-earth retelling of *Faust* (the German legend of an unhappy man who sells his soul to the Devil for knowledge and joy; it doesn't end well) in which singer-

BEEF (GERRIT GRAHAM), SWAN (PAUL WILLIAMS) AND THE PHANTOM (WILLIAM FINLEY): AS UNHOLY A TRINITY AS THE '70S OFFERED.

songwriter Winslow Leach (William Finley), after writing his own rock opera about Faust to open Swan's Paradise concert hall, has that music stolen by Swan, is framed and imprisoned, and then hideously malformed and his vocal cords destroyed during his calamitous escape from the ironically monikered Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Hiding his disfigurements under the guise of "the Phantom," he makes a deal with Swan: he'll finish writing Faust on the condition that the vocalist he loves, Phoenix (Jessica Harper) sings it opening night at the Paradise. It doesn't end well.

50 years.

After all the books, essays, reviews, interviews, 'zines, podcasts, Letterboxd blurbs, t-shirts, tattoos, VHS releases, LaserDiscs, DVDs, Blu-rays, documentaries, and rep screenings that have amassed in the last half-century to rightfully, critically, and *fanatically* rescue the film's reputation from oblivion, to study its phantasmagoric uniqueness (there has truly never been another movie like it, before or since), to explicate how it rose like a reanimated corpse — or a Phoenix — from its critical and financial collapse, what is left for us to say about *Phantom of the Paradise* at 50?

Nothing.

Rather, let's flip the record over and ask instead: at 50, what does *Phantom of the Paradise* have to say about *us*?

Maybe *everything.*

So much of our current cultural landscape now — who we are, what we enjoy, what we consume, what we ache for, what we *dream* — is all so vividly, viciously braided into the 1974 metaphoric tug-o-war rope binding Phantom and Swan together in their brutal death-struggle of Artist versus Machine, Creation versus Content. *Phantom of the Paradise*? No. *Prophecy of the Paradise* is far more like it.

How much of ourselves do we, the audience to this film and to the present-day, see when Swan is revealed to have sold his soul to the Devil long ago in order to remain young and beautiful forever? And how uncomfortably must we all squirm when Swan reveals the daily accrued interest on that transaction — that in order to remain a beautiful influencer, he must photograph himself daily in order to continue living. Per his brimstoned contract, Swan literally ceases to *exist* if he does not incessantly photograph and document himself, decades before the rest of us would do it for the endorphin hum of a handful of likes.

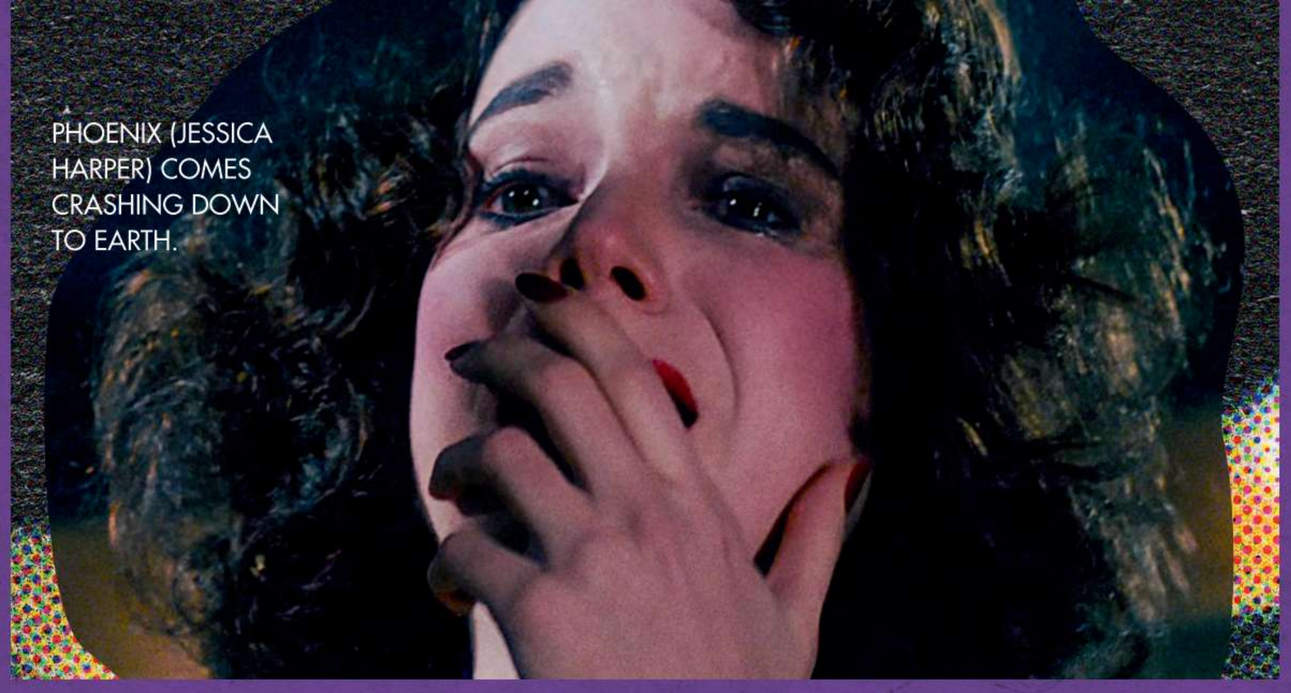
"The fact that Phantom of the Paradise is alive and well fifty years after its initial release speaks to the fact that market forces pose a continuing threat to the creative spirit."

- Brian De Palma

How angry do we become as we watch Swan and his record label buying up the entirety of Winslow's haunting rock opera (*"Dream each other's smile, and dream it never ends..."*), only to twist and molest it into cynically empty pap? As we watch De Palma's camera sinuously circle around Swan's office while a series of pop genre singers — an FM rock radio band, a folk duo, a country singer, a soul ensemble, and finally a theatrical shock-rocker named Beef (a scene-robbing Gerrit Graham) — each sing a verse, it's clear how easily beauty is chewed into bubblegum. And how angry do we become as we watch toothy vacuosities like current Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav (who even *looks* like Swan) delete entire films, and the artists' work that went into them, wholesale for tax write-offs?

How deeply do we blush and burn as we watch Swan rejigger Winslow's rock opera and its aching refrains into swooning but obvious Beach Boys-styled nostalgia-porn for the past? How

AT THE END OF ALL THINGS: SWAN AND WINSLOW COME APART.



PHOENIX (JESSICA HARPER) COMES CRASHING DOWN TO EARTH.

much have you paid to have your past repackaged and sold back to you in cynical, IP-driven numb-athons by the very industry that took those things away from you in the first place?

How embarrassed do we feel when realizing that even the Phantom himself is not above reproach, as De Palma sketches a character who moves from monstrous tragedy to tragic monster, with Winslow's fantastically unhealthy obsession of Phoenix igniting within him an atomically murderous and possessive rage… all while we swiftly pause the film to engage in a parasocial proxy war on Twitter over whichever celebrity we fixate upon and use as a stand-in for our own personality?

How culpable must we all feel as we watch the obsessively self-branding media personality Swan try to use an assassination attempt against him in the film's climax as means to launch his popularity into the stratosphere, and his power to even higher and more nefarious levels?

And don't these questions already answer themselves? Don't they haunt us, as the Phantom haunts the Paradise?

"The fact that *Phantom of the Paradise* is alive and well fifty years after its initial release," Brian De Palma told *FANGORIA* in a recent email, "speaks to the fact that market forces pose a continuing threat to the creative spirit.

"And, fortunately, people still care about this."

Of course we do. We *have* to. The America we find ourselves in today is like the Paradise of yesterday, a place where culture, and *people*, are always at risk of becoming content. When we crowd into theaters to see it again, we do so because it's funny, it's got a killer soundtrack, it's sexy. But it's also *us*. Now.

Like something out of a movie.

But this isn't a movie.

This is 2024:

Screaming.

Both at once, one indistinguishable from the other.

*A megalomaniacal blond man whirls on his stage as bullets fired by a dangerous obsessive razor through the air around him, and his audience — some old, some young, some painted, some with hair hued shades nonexistent in nature — alternately chant "*fight*" and scream in unison, as if a synapse-shredding jolt of hateful electricity has zigzagged throughout their bodies with each rhythmic backbeat of gunfire, a howling bloodlust, a roar pitched somewhere between rock concert and Nuremberg rally, the shock that this moment is finally happening, a kind of Technicolored De Palma film come to devastating life. The small blond man — showman, president, prophecy, star — screams as his own theater of American carnage envelopes him, and us, in the modern elevator music of our hellish everyday, the spectacle-as-entertainment and entertainment-as-spectacle that now endlessly spin around us like a record caught in a cosmic groove, or a dream that never ends.*

And like all dreams that never end, it becomes a nightmare. 💀

THE PHANTOM LEARNS THAT DEATH DOESN'T FIX EVERYTHING.

PHAN letter

We asked *Phantom of the Paradise* star and composer Paul Williams to channel the spirit of Brian De Palma's 1974 masterpiece and return with a message from beyond about the film's enduring appeal 50 years later...

BY PAUL WILLIAMS

Hmmm... what would the spirit of *Phantom of the Paradise* say to the world? Great question! I think she/he/they would say...

"Thanks for asking! Not to start with a complaint, but I was surprised at what a modest welcome I received on the day I was born. It felt like a conspiracy.

"Well, maybe I'm projecting... Pretty much ignored except for a couple of cities with great taste. I'd list Paris and Winnipeg as my home address if I ever got a passport. I'm grateful for the enthusiasm that seems to grow every year.

"Most importantly I want to thank the friends scattered around the world... (Swan says fans... P.W. says friends...) I'm going with Paul on this. He's gained a little wisdom through the years while Swan doesn't seem to change much.

"So thank you to our friends who became obsessed with my message and made it their mission to spread the word... Refusing to watch me live an unwatched life... and sharing their enthusiasm with anyone who would listen... it's done wonders!

"To all of you who cared that much... Thank you. I have a life today because of you. I know P.W. feels the same."

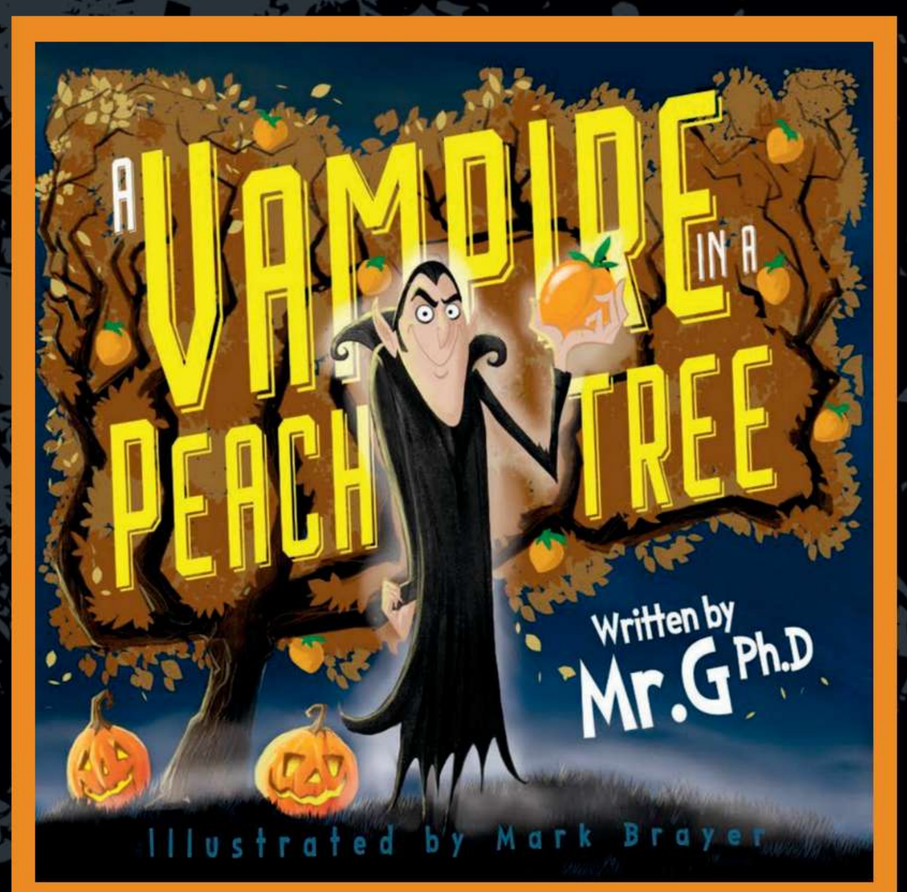
I do. That's a classy response, Phan! I think all of us who contributed to the film co-sign your comments. We're also grateful to Brian De Palma who gave us the gig in the first place. Bravo, Brian. It was the opportunity of a lifetime!

I'll close by saying if there's a warning in the film it's in Phoenix's audition song. The lyrics that bounce along in my head on sleepless nights are...

"I'm no child but I can't help wonder
It seems like some kind of spell you're under
You scare me, baby
And we should have nothing to fear!"

Still, Hope springs eternal! Thanks to all of you for making me feel like the luckiest songwriter/out of work actor in the world!

Blessings... My gratitude grows daily. I take none of it for granted. Trust me! 💀



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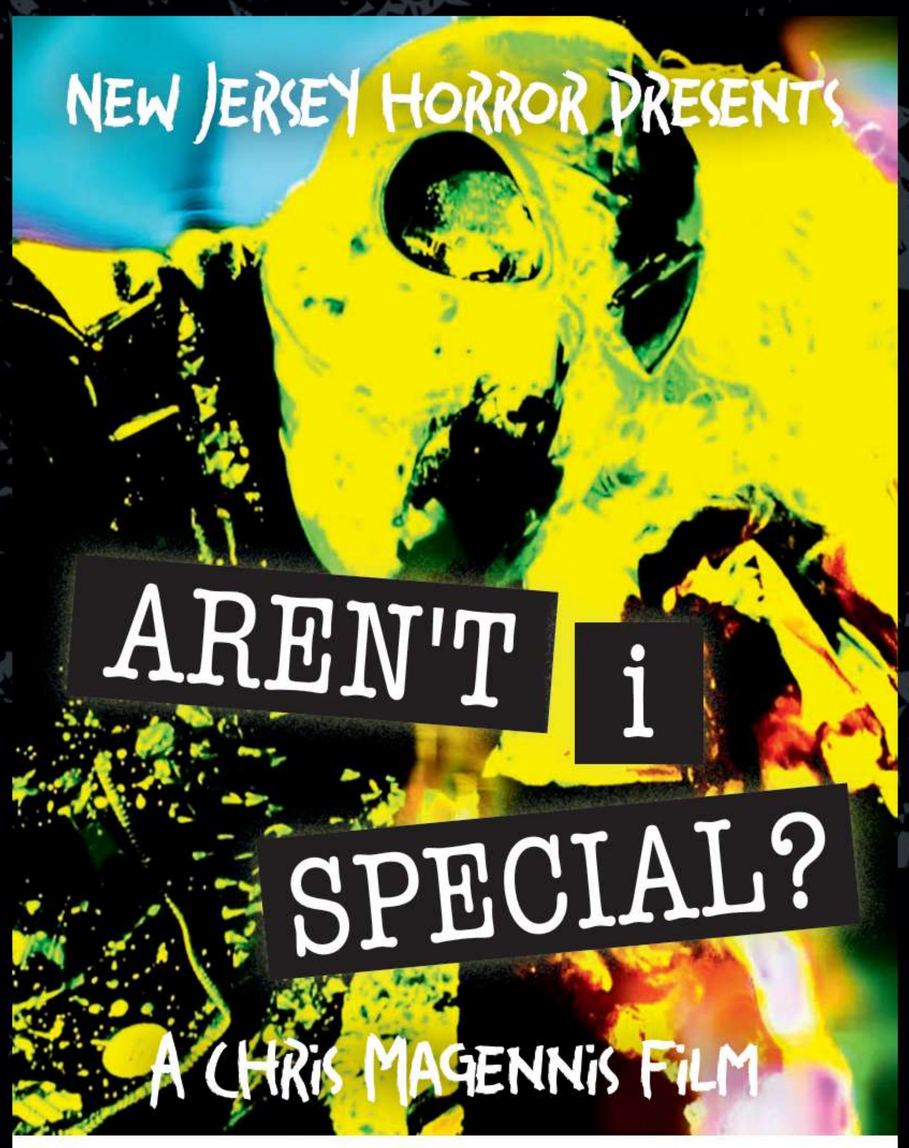

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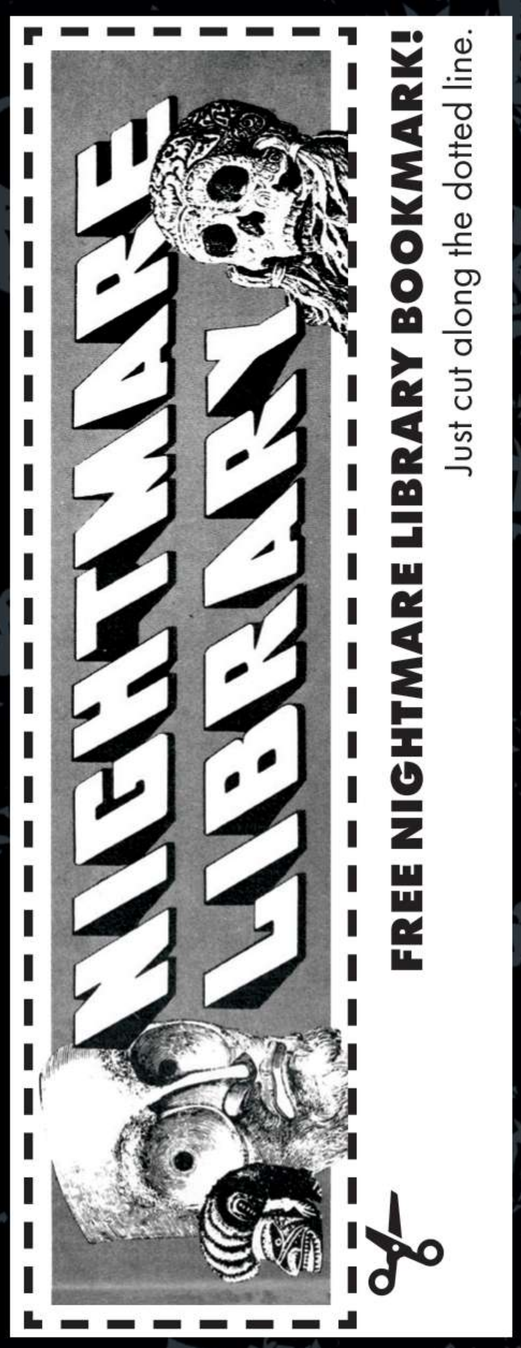


KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR:

A CONVERSATION WITH SCOTT BECK AND BRYAN WOODS ON *HERETIC*

BY REYNA CERVANTES

Filmmakers Scott Beck and Bryan Woods broke into the mainstream by creating one of the most successful horror films in recent memory: *A Quiet Place*. Since then, the duo have crafted a string of high-concept genre films that aren't afraid to remain authentic to their ideas. From creating the cult hit *Haunt*, to adapting one of Stephen King's most infamous short stories with *The Boogeyman*, or even taking a sci-fi detour with *65*, chances are you've seen a genre film in which Beck and Woods have had a hand.

Now the duo return to the director's chairs with the psychological horror film *Heretic*. The story follows Mormon missionaries Sister Barnes (Sophie Thatcher) and Sister Paxton (Chloe East) as they explore a small town, hoping to convert new followers to their faith. When they meet the enigmatic Mr. Reed (Hugh Grant), they're invited into his house of horrors and their own faith will be tested to the fullest.

Ahead of the film's theatrical release in November, FANGORIA sat down with Beck and Woods to talk about all things *Heretic* and get a look into the duo's creative process:

PHOTOS BY KIMBERLEY FRENCH • COURTESY A24

CHLOE EAST PLAYS SISTER PAXTON, ONE OF TWO MORMON MISSIONARIES WHO KNOCK ON THE WRONG DOOR.

A few years ago, you made a social media post that said *Heretic* was a deeply personal script that you've been "threatening to write for years". What makes you describe it in that way?

Bryan Woods: We really wanted to attempt something that was personal and dealt with things that genuinely terrify us in our own lives while also drawing on some of our own experiences that are sad or difficult. Over the past few years, I lost my father and we lost a few friends to COVID. So a lot of these fears and feelings about what happens when you die kind of kept coming back to us.

Heretic felt like an entry point into finally doing a story about one of the last taboo subjects in our world: religion and what happens when we die – the great unknown and all the fears that kind of come from it. *Heretic*, for us, was an attempt to have that conversation about religion and belief.

SHE'S JOINED BY SOPHIE THATCHER AS SISTER BARNES, WHO HAS SOME EXPERIENCE WITH DEEP SPIRITUAL WEIRDNESS THANKS TO HER TIME ON *YELLOWJACKETS*.

You're no strangers to exploring emotional and dramatic themes in horror. What makes *Heretic* stand out from your other films?

Scott Beck: We were interested in crafting a movie that is very cinematic while also being a conversation piece. With *Heretic*, the script is very different from something like *A Quiet Place*, yet we're still playing in the genre world while also trying to have a few layers beneath the surface for anyone who wants to investigate more deeply – whether that's the dimensionality of the characters or the themes of the film itself. *Heretic* really anchors itself in conversations about religion and faith. We always said *Heretic* should be a horror movie about about ideas – ideas that provoke you, that scare you, that make you think about your own relationship with belief long after you've left the theater.

Woods: We got really excited about asking ourselves the question: "Can we make a movie that is terrifying where the scares aren't just jump scares?" It's not loud noises and creatures popping out of the shadows; rather, it's about the

movie's philosophical underpinnings and the terror comes more from the dialogue than the action. That was the challenge we set for ourselves when we started writing this project.

Both Sophie Thatcher and Chloe East come from Mormon backgrounds. Did that influence their performances or the script in any way?

Beck: We threw as wide a net as possible in terms of casting, without any expectations that we'd have anyone coming from a Mormon background or upbringing. As we narrowed down our choices from so many incredible actors, we kept coming back to Sophie and Chloe. They kept making it through round after round of auditions. Only then did we eventually discover Sophie's direct relationship to one of the presidents of the Mormon Church and then Chloe's Mormon upbringing. Having their experiences directly influence the shape of these characters was invaluable.

Woods: I married into a Mormon family. Scott and I have so many close Mormon friends and ties to that community. It's a truth that Scott and I kind of know. We felt it when we were auditioning Chloe and Sophie, even though we didn't know that they had actual ties. There was something about the way they were performing, the truth that they were bringing to the roles that we sensed as we kept bringing them back. It's just so fundamental to filmmakers and artists. You're always chasing that truth.

Hugh Grant isn't particularly known for working in the horror genre. What was it like working with him in the role of Mr. Reed?

Beck: I can't say enough about the process of working with Hugh. He is somebody we've always admired. He's very quick-witted and great with dialogue. He's also great with nuance, for which I think he's very underrated. There are sequences in this movie that go on for twenty minutes and the philosophy of shooting was: 'If it goes on for twenty minutes, we're going to shoot a twenty-minute long take without interruption.' Hugh understands that level of dedication and that's incredibly rare. He was prepared to memorize 120 pages of straight dialogue. It felt like he was showing up to perform on stage in New York City every single day we were shooting with him.

Woods: At the risk of sounding completely over the top, when we had finished the script Mr. Reed almost felt like an impossible role to cast. The complexity of the dialogue, the different registers and tonal changes he has to him. We were kind of like, 'Who even plays this role? Do you ask Daniel Day-Lewis to come out of retirement?' It seemed like such a funny mystery to us. We and A24 kept circling back to Hugh Grant, based on his character work and last ten years of playing supporting roles.

If you could describe *Heretic* in one sentence, what would you say?

Beck: Always question the doors you walk through. 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

WRITERS/DIRECTORS BRYAN WOODS (L) AND SCOTT BECK (R) ONLY SPORT THE MOST FASHIONABLE BEANIES.

IN *HERETIC*, HUGH GRANT MAKES A RARE HORROR APPEARANCE, THOUGH BY THE END OF THE MOVIE, SISTER BARNES AND SISTER PAXTON MAY WISH HE'D STAYED OUT OF THE GENRE.

Buddy Cooper takes another fall break.

MUTILATOR 2

Another Buddy Cooper Movie

By Ernie Rockelman

It's a crisp 60 degrees on the shore of Atlantic Beach, North Carolina. The honeyed light of evening tucks comfortably under a velvety black sky and a soothing blanket of stars. I step out onto a sun-bleached fishing pier, its splintered deck extending into a welcoming sea and disappearing behind a gentle swirl of mist. Fatigued seagulls wheel overhead, their cries absorbed by the rhythmic pulse of the ocean waves. A few children frolic on the beach. To my right, a young man moves in a prone position along the sand, the sharp head of a fishing spear jutting from his mouth, pulling against the broken skin of his face. Inarticulate moans pass through the gory mess that had once been his lips, blood pouring from the wounds. The man's body slumps to the beach like a disfigured mannequin, life fluid wicking into the sand.

This is one of many times I witnessed bloody violence juxtaposed with arrestingly beautiful backdrops during my visit to the set of *Mutilator 2*. The location is the Oceanana Family Motel located along North Carolina's Southern Outer Banks. The resort doubles as living quarters for the production team during the 24-day shoot.

When I arrive, I find the crew engaged in a meeting. I've only just stepped onto the property and producer Jeff Seemann is already hot-footing toward me. There is electricity in the air as a band of smiling faces decked out in horror T-shirts discusses the best angle to capture a battle ax entering a co-ed's back while spring breakers absorb the heat of the sun just yards away.

It's been 38 years since Cooper stepped behind the camera to create *The Mutilator*, and the promise of this new sequel has fans clamoring with anticipation. "We started getting a groundswell of people getting excited and a million people writing to ask if they could do something for the film," Seeman stated. "We saw a real uptick when fans heard it was not only a sequel but also created by the same people."

One such fan acted as the catalyst behind the revival of Cooper's cult slasher flick. Producer Ann Hale is an appearance manager who met Cooper at a *Halloween* event in 2019. The pair bonded over their shared affection for ghoulish terror, meeting regularly to view flicks and trade ideas. "Buddy kept talking about wanting to make another movie," says Hale. "[But] he wasn't passionate about any of the scripts he picked up." Cooper adds, "I wanted to make another movie. Not specifically a sequel, but the idea kept hanging around."

Hale encouraged the filmmaker to return to his roots and breathe new life into the splatter film that gained him recognition. "If you want to make a movie, it should be your movie."

Cooper calls an early end to the production meeting; he can no longer wait to show me room 135. Like an excited parent watching a child open a Christmas gift, he gawks as I reach for the door handle. Inside, I find no twin beds and no color TV. Instead, I am greeted by audaciously posed

MAKEUP FX DEPARTMENT HEADS. (GET IT??)

PHOTOS COURTESY JEFF SEEMANN AND BUDDY COOPER

rubber limbs, gallon jugs of fake blood, and silicone faces staring through fearful eyes.

Effects technology has grown considerably since 1984. Still, nothing fuels the dark fantasies of horror fans like foam gelatin and liquid latex. Effects technician Joe Castro spent months molding and sculpting prosthetics. "The deaths are in [the] vein of what made the 1980s so lovable, and they work perfectly." The artist beams as he exhibits his bloody creations and adds, "Creating all the gore and violence for *Mutilator 2* has literally affected me psychologically because Cooper is so prolific at creating real-life death."

Seemann recalls discussing the death sequences with Cooper and the effects team during early Zoom meetings. "Cooper would get this big smile that was both adorable and thrilling at the same time. He's just a generous guy who freaking loves blood and guts." Actress Carroll Herring agrees: "Buddy is a lot of fun. He's a very sweet, gentle-looking man, but when you start talking about gore, he gets this big ol' grin on his face."

Cooper kids: "Halfway through the making of the first film, I was given the nickname Bloody Buddy."

There's something surgical about Cooper's handling of the movie's more grisly material. Effects assistant Josh Wasylink agrees: "He's particular about everything from colors to the placement of killing instruments." Castro adds: "Cooper's forte is looking at a shot and understanding how to take it to the next level. Props have a fun look; knives match the color themes of scenes."

Despite his clinical approach to terror, Cooper is a soothing presence

on set. He barely moves from his director's chair behind a pair of portable monitors, but his reassuring glances and slight nods of the head provide a climate of safety and encouragement.

While Cooper did attend a three-week screenwriting seminar with John Douglass at American University prior to shooting *The Mutilator*, his real education came from watching movies. His debut was in the same mold as *Friday the 13th* and other golden-age slasher pics. The filmmaker remains a steadfast fan of the genre and makes a strong effort with *Mutilator 2* to form a relationship with recent trends in horror.

In a genre hallmarked by gore and gazongas, *Mutilator 2* subverts the sexualization of violence against its female characters. The original film came under fire for its fetishization of cruelty against women, and Cooper is making every effort to right that wrong with the sequel. "I had to balance the scale. It's payback time."

Herring chimes in: "All the sexually related gore that happens to men in this film is reminiscent of the deaths of female characters in [the] first movie. It's also a reaction to the tradition of sexually active women being the first to die. It's fun doing an homage to a cult classic while getting to do these [2020s] spins on things."

"There is a decided effort to take the violence that went against women in the first film and turn it on the men," affirms Seeman. "The male characters get played hard this time. Females are killed in brutal fashion as well, but the deaths that are truly cringe-worthy happen to the men." To ensure a more favorable representation of women, Cooper reached out to female writers to draft a couple of the movie's more over-the-top kill scenes. Producer Ann Hale radiates joy while detailing her murderous contribution: a moment that channels the infamous "gaff to the junk" scene witnessed in the original.

The Soska Sisters, the twin team behind such freakishly thrilling body horror pics as *American Mary* and *Rabid*, have also contributed a sequence of sublime nastiness. I am not able to divulge the details of the scene, but I will say that male audiences will be checking the condition of their private parts long after viewing.

Meta horror has become quite commonplace. While innovative pictures like *Scream* and *The Cabin in the Woods* effectively broke down the fourth wall, the genre has since become saturated with self-awareness. Cooper takes the concept to the extreme with *Mutilator 2*. The story follows a crew of *Mutilator* fans who have decided to shoot a sequel to their favorite slasher flick. Deep into the production, the director is inexplicably murdered. With the bulk of the picture in the can, the crew decides to press on. Following principal photography, they hold a wrap party where actors from the original film are invited to participate in the festivities. Fans will delight in seeing *Mutilator* jokester Bill Hitchcock and final girl Ruth Martinez portraying themselves. The original Big Ed himself, Jack Chatham, even makes a cameo appearance as a patron in the motel restaurant. Throughout the night, a shadowy figure stalks the production team and murders them one by one.

Cooper desperately wanted Chatham to portray himself in the movie and the aging actor was overwhelmed with emotion when he stepped on set. Seemann opines, "Jack was so excited to hold the gaff. The look on his face was pure joy."

Unfortunately, at 94 years of age, Chatham did not feel he could withstand the strenuous demands of a full-time shoot, so character actor Terry Kiser was enlisted to fill the role. Motel guests light up with happiness at the sight of the *Weekend at Bernie's* star. At 83 himself, Kiser emits the aura of someone much younger. "I surround myself with youth," he says.

NO FALL BREAK FOR THE WEARY: *MUTILATOR 2* EXPANDS THE SCOPE OF THE ORIGINAL.

THE *M2* CREW (LEFT TO RIGHT): MICHAEL WOOTEN, 1ST AC; JAMES DOUGLAS, 2ND AC; CHANCE MADISON, CINEMATOGRAPHER; AND RYAN LEWIS, B-CAM OPERATOR.

DIRECTOR BUDDY COOPER AND FANGO CONTRIBUTOR ERNIE ROCKELMAN ON THE SET OF *MUTILATOR 2*.

"It keeps you on your toes and helps keep you young."

Kiser's first experience with horror came in 1988 when he played the devious Dr. Crews in *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood*. "Horror has the best fans I have ever seen in my life. They are so dedicated and so wonderful," says Kiser. "After that experience, I started looking into horror films." His energy level reaches a shattering high as he launches into *Mutilator 2*. He fires up his third cigarette to calm himself down. "After the first two days I said this is going to be successful. When you see a crew member laughing or getting a chill, you know you've got the audience. That moment will transcend every time."

Kiser's dedication to his role is inspiring. At 4:00 a.m., cinematographer Chance Madison announces Kiser's wides are in the can. All that remains are close-ups and cutaways. Nonetheless, Kiser remains on set. His presence helps elevate the project and his professionalism is contagious. "I'm the top dog on this thing, and it always starts from the top," says Kiser. "I want everybody to say this boy's doing his work."

Another thing that drew Kiser to the role was the opportunity to work with his good friend and rising horror star, Damian Maffei, who plays Columbo, the detective tasked with catching the vicious killer. The two met at a Mad Monster Party convention and have since become "like family."

Mutilator 2 marks Damian's fourth straight foray into horror, following *The Strangers: Prey at Night*, *Haunt* and *Wrong Turn*. "I have a long history with *The Mutilator*," he says. "I owned four copies of the film on VHS and a video store standee when I was a kid."

Watching the warm interaction between Maffei and Kiser is very sweet. It's also infectious.

Much of the crew is from Ohio, and many of them have worked together previously. Hale emphasizes, "They all know each other. They're all awesome. The only rule we had when putting together the cast and crew was: no assholes." Seemann reiterates: "Buddy got on the phone with each member of the cast and crew. He said, 'I want you to make me a movie and have fun doing it. If you can do those two things, come to North Carolina and make this movie with me.' The crew brings a family vibe to the movie."

Cooper hands me his headset and invites me to sit in his chair while filming. At one point, I ask about nearby locations used in the first *Mutilator* picture. Seemann draws up a map and tosses me his car keys.

At the heart of everything is Cooper. He is the foundation on which the production is built, providing the crew a bedrock of affirmative willingness. Their affection for their leader echoes throughout my interviews.

"We love Buddy. We're doing everything we can to make it work for him," says Hale. Seemann agrees: "We want to give Buddy everything we possibly can." Castro elaborates: "I feel as though everyone has been hand-chosen to be on the team not only because of their skill level, but because we all appreciate the opportunity to work on this sequel and to work for Buddy."

Sitting behind a broad drum set in the front room of his luxury apartment, Cooper tells me he hopes *Mutilator 2* provides viewers a "good time." Through the glass patio doors at his back sunlight, laughter, and transparent waters flow along with some of the most delightfully disturbing murders ever captured on celluloid. 💀

THE *M2* CREW GETS A HEAD(LESS) START ON MERCH.

THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

DEMI MOORE, MARGARET QUALLEY, AND FILMMAKER CORALIE FARGEAT ON THE, WELL, SUBSTANTIAL BODY HORROR OF *THE SUBSTANCE*.

BY ISAAC FELDBERG

"NO ONE IMAGINED THE AMOUNT OF BLOOD I WOULD WANT."

Coralie Fargeat smiles proudly as she remembers that day, filming *The Substance*, when she brandished a fire-hose and baptized a studio audience in a thousand gallons of red, sticky stuff. "No, I need more! I need more! I need it to spray further away!" Fargeat recalls saying, with delight. As soaked as her front-row spectators were, the nosebleeds weren't yet bleeding.

THE SUBSTANCE HAS PLENTY OF STYLE, TOO.

In Fargeat's defense, anyone who saw her brutally thrilling feature debut *Revenge*, about a woman hunting down three men who left her for dead, could have been advised that too much blood is never enough. Nobody was ready for how slippery (and sticky) a luxury villa would become after Fargeat decked the halls. The Morocco production kept running out of fake blood; they flew extra ingredients in from Paris and were constantly mixing more on set.

On *The Substance*, it remained challenging to make supply meet demand, but Fargeat says the final result was sufficiently cathartic — especially for her. "It was a real moment, me splattering everyone with the fire-hose," she says. "That was a pretty wild, great energy."

The Substance finds Fargeat turning her uncompromising gaze on the palm trees and pink billboards of Los Angeles, where aging actress Elisabeth Sparkle (Demi Moore) is cast aside by sexist executives. Threatened with replacement, Elisabeth learns of a miracle drug that will preserve her youth and help her become, in the words of its mysterious manufacturers, "a better version of yourself." Injecting herself with phosphorescent green liquid, Elisabeth finds out what that means once a younger, "perfect" specimen of beauty (Margaret Qualley) wriggles free from her body.

"The two of you are one," read the instructions. Elisabeth can live as her double, who names herself Sue, for seven days at a time, after which point they need to switch back. While one runs amok, the other lies comatose, sustained through a feeding tube. But youth is intoxicating — and, as her star rises, Sue breaks the rules, at a grisly cost to Elisabeth (who, remember, is also Sue).

Revenge was hailed upon its release in 2017, on the eve of #MeToo, as a feminist subversion of rape-revenge storytelling; Fargeat maintains she was more interested in transformation than exploitation. Still, following a character who might appear weak to others, and charting her ferocious reclamation of agency after rising from the ashes, Fargeat confronted the male gaze historically associated with that subgenre and stabbed it through the eye socket — literally, in one of *Revenge*'s most satisfying showdowns.

"BODY HORROR IS RELATED TO ALL OUR QUESTIONING AND FEARS ABOUT OUR BODY — THAT IT WILL BE INVADED, THAT IT WILL MUTATE, THAT IT'S GOING TO DIE OR DISSOLVE — AS WELL AS OUR WISH WE COULD KEEP IT FOREVER OR ATTEMPT TO TRANSFORM IT." - CORALIE FARGEAT

ELISABETH (DEMI MOORE) IS READY FOR HER CLOSE-UP.

That's not to say that Fargeat saw *Revenge* this way at first; it took time for her to realize what she'd made. "It was a moment in my life when I'd become conscious of the feminist discourse I was starting to articulate in my films, that I'd had within me unconsciously for a very long time," Fargeat says. "In *Revenge*, it was unconscious. But when you become interested in feminism, it's crazy to discover how much everything is related, how the male gaze has built all these inequalities, the ways societies still push women to the side. I've always been struck by how powerful and violent this is."

Personally, Fargeat was struggling with feelings too common for women in their forties: "I started to experience thoughts," she reflects, "that I was not young, perfect, or sexy; that I was not able to give birth and therefore didn't have a place in the world; that I was worth nothing, I meant nothing, that my life was over."

Simultaneously, Fargeat was shocked she could have spiraled over something as natural as aging. "It's definitely related to the gaze," she says. "What you experience as a woman — the way you're seen, the way other people look at you, the way this defines the place or status you have in society — then in ricochet influences the very way you're looking at yourself."

With *The Substance*, she wanted to address this ricochet by amplifying it, as she had through *Revenge*'s metaphorical violence. Fargeat envisioned "another world" where external pressures and internal psychoses around body image, beauty standards, and the hyper-sexualization of the female form could be taken to extremes — and embodied by two actresses who instinctively understood the story's substance.

Once Hollywood's most sought-after star, now mature enough to have experienced the industry's sexism and ageism firsthand, Moore knew Fargeat was asking her to play a version of herself, but she decided to act in the film upon finding its themes to be universal. "It was daring, weird, and wild," she says. "As a character, Elisabeth was reflecting things that we all at different times have felt and experienced."

Qualley calls *The Substance* "this inverted fairytale with all the tropes we're disgustingly familiar with," but what excited her most about making it was Moore. "She's a fighter," Qualley recalls. "We shot this movie over five months and her determination didn't falter for one day. I learned so much from her. She's incredibly special and generous."

On top of requiring Moore to appear naked on screen, the role demanded she disappear under layers of prosthetics as Elisabeth deteriorated. Depending on the day, Moore spent between "six to nine hours" in the chair as special-effects artists applied the makeup necessary to meet Fargeat's mandate that the production achieve as much as possible practically.

"The movie is about flesh and bone, about how you feel in your own flesh," explains Fargeat. "The reality of what you film impacts the way people receive it." The inherent restriction of working with prosthetics challenged Fargeat "not to show everything but to have powerful, symbolic images that would tell the story in a more philosophical way," she adds.

"One of the most unusual elements to this," Moore says, "is that there's very little dialogue. So much had to be conveyed through silent storytelling, just physicality and expression."

AND SUE (MARGARET QUALLEY) SUPPOSEDLY GOT THE BETTER END OF THIS DEAL.

DIRECTOR CORALIE FARGEAT PERFECTS QUALLEY'S TRANSFORMATION.

"WHEN EVERYTHING WAS ON, I COULD ONLY SEE OUT OF ONE EYE, I COULDN'T ACTUALLY HEAR ANYTHING, AND MY NECK HAD TO BE BENT TO THE SIDE AND BEAR LOTS OF WEIGHT. IT WAS PAINFUL!"

- MARGARET QUALLEY

PHOTOS AND STILLS COURTESY OF MUBI AND UNIVERSAL STUDIOS • PHOTOS BY CHRISTINE TAMALET

One of the first sequences Fargeat dreamed up finds Elisabeth standing nude at her bathroom mirror, emptying the titular liquid into her veins, then writhing in agony on the floor. Elisabeth's spine splits open to form a fleshy, oozing orifice; crawling out comes Sue, viscid yet vivid.

"I put myself at the place of the character, to experience her body transforming, what she could feel without seeing what's happening," Fargeat says. "I wanted to feel how powerful, painful, and weird it could be to have something else grow inside you." Naturally, she calls this the "birthing" sequence.

"It was unusual, even challenging" to "stay in the truth and reality of the inside experience of what Elisabeth was going through," Moore says. "At the same time, my job *was* to anchor it to an emotional truth."

After Sue overstays her welcome and Elisabeth starts to decay, the effects are initially minimal, with one finger blackening, before they worsen. As Sue basks in the limelight and flaunts her beauty, Elisabeth suffers the consequences, both psychologically and physically. "In retrospect," says Moore, "I've gained incredible respect for my fellow actors who have done entire movies where they are in prosthetics from start to finish. It requires a real commitment – and it's taxing!"

Qualley faced another challenge: transforming into the idealized Sue, who finds superstardom as the host of her own workout series. "At first, I was really trying to give Coralie the body that she wanted," she recalls. "I was working out with a trainer the movie set up and working with a nutritionist to gain muscle. And then, I realized that I was never going to achieve the butt-to-waist ratio."

Instead, Qualley took a step back, reflecting on "the reality of entering the world untouched and fully formed, without knowing pain," she explains. "I started doing yoga really seriously, to try and undo some of the damage my body has, and it worked. I grew an inch that year!"

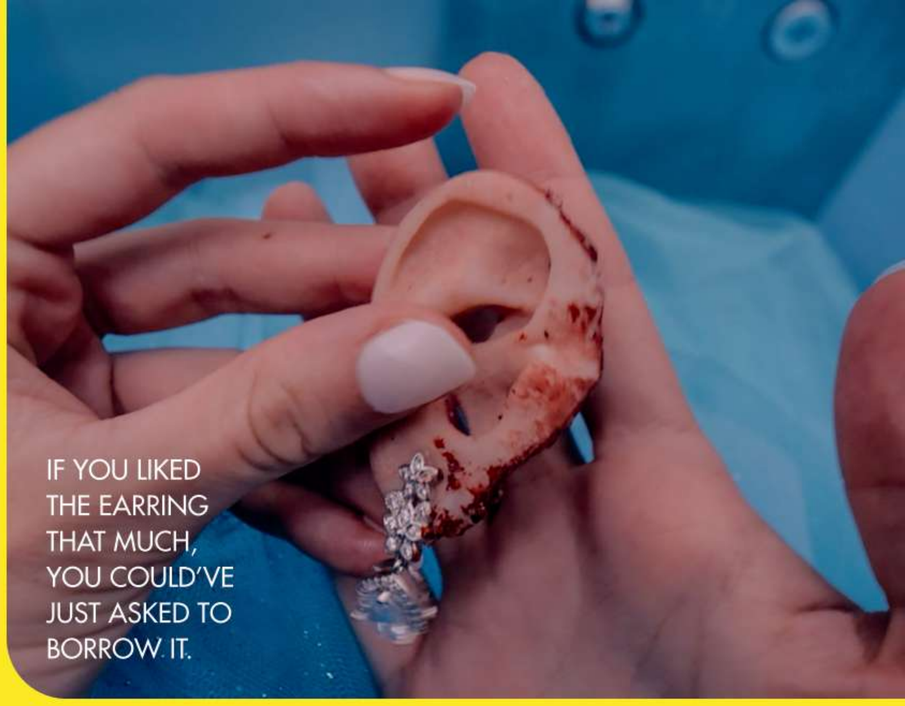
Elisabeth ends up stealing from herself, rather than regaining the youth she once possessed; Moore found this so intriguing an idea that prosthetics never felt like a bridge too far. Indeed, it was freeing not to recognize herself in the later stages of Elisabeth's transformation. "It's what made it juicy and enticing," Moore reflects. "Luckily, I do have an ability to get very zen and be still when I'm sitting in the makeup chair."

Fargeat collaborated with make-up artist Pierre-Olivier Persin to realize her vision of "not only an unrealistic aging transformation but some kind of metamorphosis." The scene from *The Shining* where Jack Torrance kisses a woman rising out of a bathtub, only to find himself in the arms of a cackling crone, influenced Elisabeth's gradual deformation into a decrepit, hunched-over hag; on set, the crew called this creature "Gollum," Fargeat says, grinning. "I wanted to push even the first degradation past the point of normalcy and realism."

Persin applied prosthetics over a body double's arms and legs for shots of the emaciated Gollum staggering down a corridor, did Moore's makeup separately, filmed her from head to waist, then combined that with a shot of the double's lower half. For a scene where Elisabeth and Sue face off, he made the stunt double a mask resembling Gollum's gnarled visage. "Demi wanted to do as much as she could physically," Fargeat says. "But when we were shooting the stunts that Demi couldn't do, this was another trick we had."

The Substance goes into overdrive for its bloodbath of a finale, involving a monstrosity that recalls the amorphous mass of flesh from John Carpenter's *The Thing* but retains a piteous quality, with Elisabeth and Sue visibly trapped in its viscera. It was dubbed "Monstroelizasue" ("Monstroel" for short). Fargeat needed her actresses to appear inside this abomination, designing a suit they could be encased within. "I wanted to find their faces in its back, to create a monstrous creature with a lot of humanity in it," Fargeat says. "I want the audience to be moved by her softness."

For Qualley, who's claustrophobic, this was a total nightmare. "She hated wearing the suit," Fargeat recalls, laughing. "The reality of what was required from a prosthetics perspective was incredibly daunting," Qualley explains. "It took five hours each day to put everything on and an hour and a half to take it off. When everything was on, I could only see out of one eye, I couldn't actually hear anything, and my neck had to be bent to the side and bear lots of weight. It was painful!"



For Elisabeth and Sue to morph together, jointly reckoning with their internalized self-loathing, gave *The Substance* a twisted symmetry — even empowerment through body positivity. "I think Monstroelizasue is very pretty," Qualley admits.

Moore agrees. One deliriously over-the-top moment finds Monstroel seated at a vanity mirror, trying on earrings in a callback to an earlier scene of Elisabeth anxiously inspecting her makeup before a date she ultimately bails on. "She's looking and only seeing what is wrong," Moore recalls of that scene. "It's a particularly heartbreaking moment that illustrates that moment of seeking perfection, and the depths of fear and insecurity Elisabeth is sitting with."

But by the time Monstroel emerges, self-love is all she has left. "The overarching theme is acceptance of self as we are, and appreciation of self," Moore says. "That scene was crucial in anchoring the emotional depth of pain that then allowed us to launch into the places that it goes."

While Fargeat didn't pitch *The Substance* as body-horror, she cites the influence of David Cronenberg's *The Fly*, with its startling eruptions of the flesh and tragic vision of mind and body colliding. "Body horror is related to all our questioning and fears about our body — that it will be invaded, that it will mutate, that it's going to die or dissolve — as well as our wish we could keep it forever or attempt to transform it," Fargeat says. "What makes us human is that we have a body. It's one of the most powerful truths that connects us with our mortal, human condition; in and of itself, body horror is a very philosophical, metaphorical genre." 💀

Kōji Shiraishi's HOUSE OF SAYURI

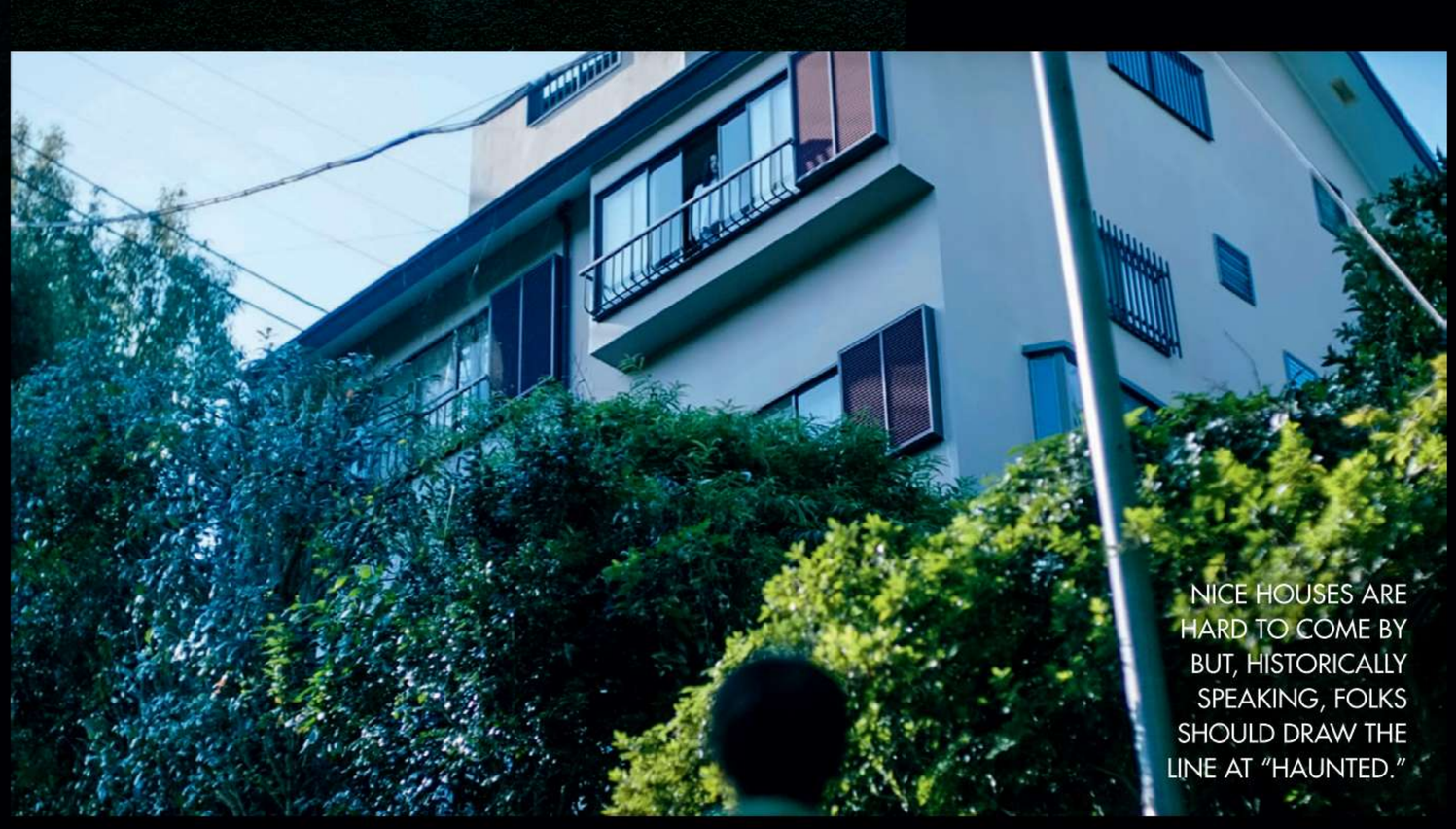
The Cult Filmmaker Talks HOUSE OF SAYURI, Human Resilience, And The Future Of J-Horror.

Written By Amber T

Translated By Yuko Torihara

Since his terrifying found footage horror *Noroi: The Curse*, Kōji Shiraishi has been one of Japan's most consistent horror filmmakers, boasting a gargantuan filmography of over thirty features, including urban legend-focused *Carved: The Slit-Mouthed Woman*, the supernatural showdown *Sadako vs. Kayako*, and even more in the way of direct-to-video offerings like the riotous *Senritsu Kaiki File Kowasugi* series.

While much of Shiraishi's work remains untranslated and inaccessible to non-Japanese audiences, his devout international fanbase continues to grow with Arrow Films giving *Noroi* its first ever official Blu-ray release, and the director's appearances in recent documentaries like Shudder's *The Found Footage Phenomenon* and *Generation Terror*. To



NICE HOUSES ARE HARD TO COME BY BUT, HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, FOLKS SHOULD DRAW THE LINE AT "HAUNTED."

KOKORO MORITA IS FOCUSED ON THE TV, BUT THIS AIN'T *THE RING*, GIRL. TURN YOUR HEAD!

celebrate the Japanese release of Shiraishi's latest, *House of Sayuri*, and its North American premiere at Fantasia earlier this year, FANGORIA and translator Yuko Torihara sat down with Shiraishi to find out more about the haunted house horror – and how many tentacles his fans can expect to see.

In *House of Sayuri*, the Kamiki family moves into their dream home only to discover it is currently occupied by a restless, vengeful female spirit. It's up to young Norio (Ryôka Minamide) to appease her rage before she destroys the family entirely. While Shiraishi is known for his highly original, often bizarre, and always entertaining stories, *House of Sayuri* is actually based on a manga by Rensuke Oshikiri which ran from 2010 to 2011. When it came to adapting it for the big screen, there was really only ever one man for the task. Kōji Shiraishi explains:

> Although I first read the manga five or six years ago, the producer of the film, Tasaka-san, suggested I read it again and tell him what I thought. I found it so interesting and was immediately excited to adapt it into a film. A story about human beings and a ghost living together under the same roof and fighting each other… that's right up my alley. I signed up immediately, and felt that if this film were to be made in Japan, I would be the one to make it.

Joining Shiraishi in bringing *House of Sayuri* to life was film-maker Mari Asato, best known for *Ju-On: Black Ghost* and *Fatal Frame*, her adaptation of the popular video game of the same name. Asato was recruited to assist with writing duties specifically for her ability to craft a bonafide crowd-pleaser. According to Shiraishi:

> I didn't have the time to write a full screenplay, so we had to involve a co-writer, and I suggested we bring Asato-san on board. Asato-san knows how to entertain the crowd and she herself loves the horror genre. We weren't looking for someone to write an obscure and niche film but someone who could write a solidly entertaining film. She came to mind immediately and turned out to be the right person for the job. To begin, I wrote a plot summary then handed it to her to write the screenplay. We would then pass each other the drafts, each of us editing along the way. Ultimately, I would rewrite some words on set accordingly, but she really put down the backbone of the storytelling.

With just two volumes, Oshikiri's *Sayuri* leaves plenty of room for a director to flesh out the plot (especially one as creatively gonzo as Shiraishi), specifically regarding the ghostly Sayuri herself. In *House of Sayuri*, Shiraishi demonstrates his ability to craft nuanced characters who neither fit neatly into the category of 'good' or 'bad' – a particularly dark evolution of her backstory means you're more likely to leave the film feeling a combination of terror and deep sadness. "To make

WHEN YOU BUY HER HOUSE, SAYURI (NONOKA TERUI) IS NOT BRINGING A WELCOME BASKET.

NORIO (RYÔKA MINAMIDE) LOOKS AS THOUGH HE'S SEEN A... WELL, YOU KNOW.

Sayuri into a film," says Shiraishi, "I felt I needed to delve deeper to make her character more dimensional. I, myself, was curious to find out what happened to her. I felt that if we didn't explore that past, we would lose an essential component and her story wouldn't feel complete."

Throughout his *oeuvre*, Shiraishi has shown an affinity for the unknowable realms of cosmic horror, from the world-ending worm god of *Cult* to the dimension-hopping beasts of the *Senritsu Kaiki File Kowasugi* series. With *House of Sayuri*, Shiraishi has returned to horror on a smaller scale, with Sayuri's wrath mostly contained to a single house. But far from feeling restricted, Shiraishi still found a way to give *House of Sayuri* his signature tentacle treatment:

> It's true, I've done many films with a cosmic horror feel, which I suppose comes naturally to me. I felt a great sympathy towards the characters in the source material, so I wanted to be faithful to that in the film adaptation. Perhaps you could sense some cosmic feel regardless, especially at the ending with the tentacles! To me it didn't feel like too much of a departure from the intention of making it.

One reason Japanese horror is so beloved among horror fans is a genre-wide refusal to pander with happy endings. From as far back as *Onibaba* to Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Pulse*, Japanese horror insists that *nobody* is safe from sorrowful spirits and vengeful curses. Much of Shiraishi's own work revels in this indifference, with one of his most nihilistic works, *Grotesque*, earning an outright ban in the United Kingdom due to the film's "wallowing in the spectacle of sadism" (British Board of Film Classification 2009), something Shiraishi himself hilariously finds "flattering." However, *House of Sayuri* has a defiant streak of optimism that feels distinct from the bleaker offerings of the genre. That's not to say the film doesn't get dark – Shiraishi takes this story to places many filmmakers wouldn't dare – but the resilience of the human spirit is palpable. Even the rules for staying strong under Sayuri's malevolent presence feel straight from a handbook on how to beat a depressive slump: eat well, exercise, and, above all, love one another. Shiraishi explains this difference:

> I love the fighting spirit, personally. J-horror tends to always be about humans haunted by ghosts and being destroyed by them. It always ends badly for the humans. I'm inspired by horror abroad, especially American horror, where characters fight back against all odds. Even when there are moments of defeat, there is a high stakes climax scene – a clear resolution and/or a triumph at the end. As I was wondering why we don't see that human fighting spirit in J-horror, I came across this manga which was all about human resilience. I would say, however, that the clarity in which the fighting spirit is depicted in the film comes straight from the original manga.

Even the most ardent fans of the genre would admit that, since the glory days of *Ringu* and *Ju-On*, Japan's horror output has failed to change the game. Even Shiraishi, considered alongside Hideo Nakata, Takashi Shimizu, and Norio Tsuruta as one of the J-horror masters, recognizes this, previously giving an impassioned promise that *House of Sayuri* is here to "shake up the stagnant J-horror genre." Shiraishi continues:

> I feel that J-horror as an industry tends to be set in its own ways. There is a certain narrative template where humans are terrorized by ghosts and ultimately get defeated by them without any real push and pull. I'm interested in diversifying this narrative style. I also feel that it would expand our audience base. Foreign horror films are filled with such original storylines and I'm always inspired by that. Japanese films have a low budget but you could make different kinds of films with different, new ideas. I would like to think that the release of *House of Sayuri* will make the industry rethink the storytelling template, and be more open to the possibilities of J-horror. 💀

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

PHOTOS COURTESY GENTOSHA, SHOWGATE & HAKUHODO DY

BY JULIEANN STIPIDIS

THIRD TIME'S THE HARM:

DAMIEN LEONE'S TERRIFIER 3

It's mid-April, and I'm looking at Christmas wreaths. No, I'm not in an overeager home decor store – I'm at the Bayley Seton Hospital in Staten Island, New York, on the set of Damien Leone's *Terrifier 3*, the rabidly anticipated tertiary film of his *Terrifier* franchise. Next to the Christmas wreaths lie eight progressively blood(ier)-splattered costumes for one of the most iconic modern slasher villains, Art the Clown. The crew is mere days away from wrapping, and the vibes are jovial.

WRITER/DIRECTOR/MAKEUP FX ARTIST DAMIEN LEONE TOUCHES UP VICTORIA (SAMANTHA SCAFFIDI).

"I can't believe we made it," a visibly relieved Leone declares to me. "This has been the most taxing film of my career – by far."

With the breakout success of *Terrifier 2*, the already fanatical fan base exploded with new devotees and mainstream appeal, so for the third film, budgets were expanded, crew was tripled, deadlines were tightened, and pressure and stressors have been constant.

"It could take years to write a good screenplay, and I had to do it in a couple months," creator/writer/director (and perfectionist) Leone explains. "Luckily, I knew where part three was going, but I'm still writing this movie as we go, and my actors have been terrified [*laughs*]. Like, 'Okay, what are we doing today? Did you write more dialogue?'"

The typically Halloween-set *Terrifier* franchise (since Art the Clown's feature film debut in the 2013 anthology *All Hallows' Eve*) finds itself exploring new territory for this iteration: Yuletide, a fresh idea from longtime producer Phil Falcone, while they were still concocting *Terrifier 2*.

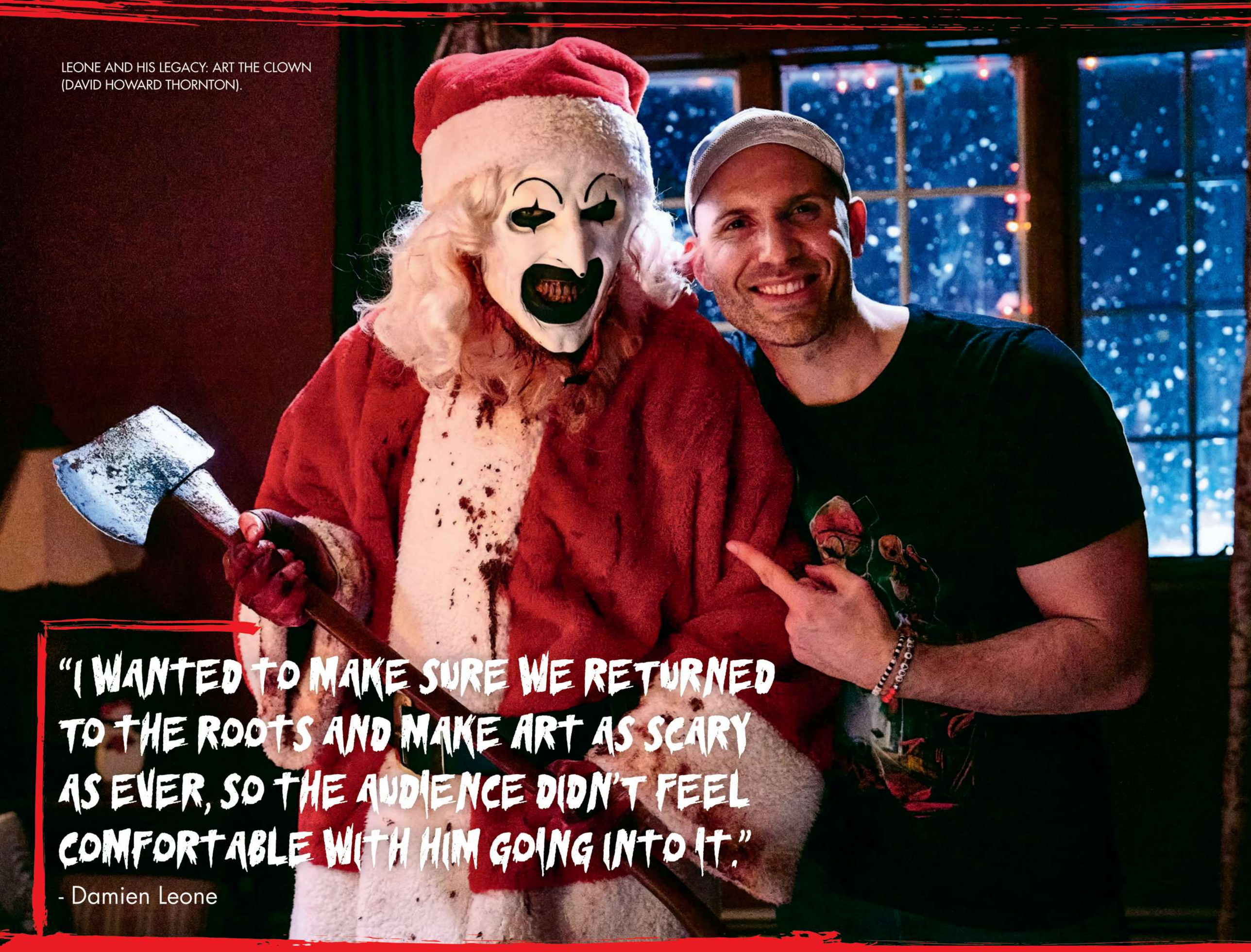
"I've loved Christmas-based horror and maniac Santa Clauses since I was a kid," Leone enthuses, citing *Black Christmas* and *Tales from the Crypt*'s "And All Through the House" episode as formative. Leone couldn't resist placing Art the Clown in the "hysterical and horrific" antics of a killer Santa movie, while remaining adamant about putting his own spin on the subgenre.

In *Terrifier 3*, we again follow Sienna (Lauren LaVera), picking up five years after the events of *Terrifier 2*, and witness how she and her brother Jonathan (Elliott Fullam) have been coping with major PTSD, with Sienna in and out of mental health facilities. Spending one fateful Christmas with their relatives, the siblings, particularly Sienna, find themselves again targeted by the ruthless clown as we unravel the answers as to why – with Leone confirming fans' observations that Christian ideologies are thematically present behind the arduous battle between Sienna and her nemesis Art.

Today I'm observing scenes in Art's lair – a key location to the franchise we've watched in several contexts. Art's perennial portrayer, David Howard Thornton, and Samantha Scaffidi as Art's cohort, the facially-disfigured Victoria, are in the wings, awaiting their cues, and doused in blood.

The dark lair is filled with Art-coded goodies: hacksaws, chains, gasoline, and hammers. Art's bag of weaponry is always evolving, and *Terrifier 3* adds bold weapons of mass destruction to his repertoire – one of of which I'm about to watch him build today.

"I feel like we're doing an Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone movie," producer Falcone tells me, hinting at the diabolical scale of Art's terrorism. Rats are Thornton and Scaffidi's costars for the day, running amok on the basement floor. These rats are *Terrifier* veterans, as the crew has used them five times prior. The unlucky



LEONE AND HIS LEGACY: ART THE CLOWN (DAVID HOWARD THORNTON).

"I WANTED TO MAKE SURE WE RETURNED TO THE ROOTS AND MAKE ART AS SCARY AS EVER, SO THE AUDIENCE DIDN'T FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH HIM GOING INTO IT."

- Damien Leone

(prop) rats are getting cooked by Art's hands as the cameras roll – but likely with less than a fraction of the torture his human victims will endure.

Over the course of their 60-plus days of production, *Terrifier 3*'s approximately 30-person crew has filmed in over 40 locations, including a crew member's Long Island home redressed in retro Christmas decor, to a mall in Staten Island, to Bill Diamond Productions in Upstate New York. Costumer and set designer Olga Turka encourages fans to observe every thoughtful detail of the wardrobes and set pieces: "Everything is thought out – all the color palettes, the patterns, and it all lends to the same message of the film." Bigger budgets have afforded them a bigger playground, as well as next-level technical tools, including anamorphic lenses, which has thrilled cinematographer George Steuber. "I never thought I'd be shooting with anything on Panavision," Steuber tells me, recalling the early *Terrifier* days when he'd run out of camera batteries. "[*Terrifier 3*] is moody and very controlled, with a completely different look."

David Howard Thornton's natural affability and past career as a preschool teacher affords him the ability to mix and mingle with anybody. In between takes, Thornton is goofing off, talking politics, and singing tunes from *West Side Story*. "It's funny how I came [to NYC] to do musical theater, and here I am," Thornton jokes, comically donning the black-and-white Art uniform while singing the classic line, "I feel pretty!"

Thornton even hosted an intimate Q&A session for his younger co-stars to ensure they felt comfortable filming with him, recalling how terrified 8-year-old co-star Luciana VanDette was. "I never want to scare a child," he explains. "She was so scared of me before I started doing silly Spongebob voices for her."

However, the fictional children of Miles County *do* have much to fear, as Leone teases an opening sequence (which boasts nods to *Scream* and *When a Stranger Calls*) that even the boldest of fans will deem "very controversial." Leone's primary goal for *Terrifier 3* is to recapture the "grittiness" of both his *Terrifier* short film from 2011 and the original 2016 full-length feature, as he feels *Terrifier 2* was too far removed from that. "I wanted to make sure we returned to the roots and make Art as scary as ever, so the audience didn't feel comfortable with him going into it," Leone explains. "I wanted it to feel like you've never met Art the Clown before, and you don't know what to expect."

Expect the scariest mall Santa since Billy in *Silent Night, Deadly Night*, which Thornton tells me he watched in preparation. "I see Art as more vicious this time around," Thornton describes. "He's gotten more creative in his kills; he's upping the ante. He's

not just in the shadows – he's going out in public." Leone and Thornton remain in constant conversation with one another about how far Art will go, as Thornton is the self-described "comedy guy," and Leone wishes to reel in some of the humor in an effort to avoid the hokiness of Freddy Kreuger in *Freddy's Dead*. "There are bits where Art is joking, and then he just switches immediately into serious mode, which makes him even more terrifying that he can just switch on a dime," says Leone.

Sadistic Art seems to be overwhelmingly winning the battle for *Terrifier 3*, as Leone tells me he's suffered "sleepless nights" hoping to outdo himself regarding Art's elaborate kills scenes, which is arguably what the franchise is most famous for. "There's only so many things you can do to the human body," Leone says. "We're competing with everything else out there –*Thanksgiving*, *Saw* – but I feel very confident with one scene in particular." Leone describes this scene as a double kill that serves as his own derivation of two classic cinematic shower kills: *Scarface* and the all-timer, *Psycho*. The filmmaker also extracts ideas from crime scene books, fiction novels, and medieval imagery.

"There's a kill in the movie that's definitely going to be very controversial, but I'm happy we did it, because why not?" Thornton tells me. "Art's evil! We need to show how truly evil he is!" When asked how far is *too* far for Art the Clown, Thornton insists we'll never see lustful murder, as he sees Art as strictly asexual and completely disinterested in sexuality. Leone also has limits with Art's younger victims and believes in the stark difference between being edgy for the sake of it and alienating the audience. "The safety net I have is that it's so clearly a fictional world: a supernatural clown, a heroine with a magic sword who's an angel warrior – we're living in a comic book," Leone explains.

Resuming his habit of making audiences physically sick, Art continues to bring the gross-out gags this go-around, as a certain vomit scene came very close to making Thornton, himself, lose his cookies. "I can't do vomit, so everybody thought that was hilarious," Thornton discloses. "I can handle all the blood and guts and poop… but vomit? Nope!" With

PHOTOS BY JESSE KORMAN • COURTESY DARK AGE CINEMA

LEONE AND PRODUCER PHIL FALCONE ARE HANDS-ON FILMMAKERS. WHAT THEIR HANDS ARE ON HERE, WE COULDN'T TELL YA.

"I'VE LOVED CHRISTMAS-BASED HORROR AND MANIAC SANTA CLAUSES SINCE I WAS A KID."

- Damien Leone

stunt coordinator Drew Leary on board, Thornton continues to perform some of his own stunts, along with the help of double Bobby McFarlane. "I'm a little bruised up from falling into objects last week," says Thornton, then jokes, "You suffer for your Art."

Every scrappy, indie horror can be described as a labor of love, but the creation of the *Terrifier* films seems especially onerous, particularly regarding the special effects, which was once entirely made by the hands of Leone and producer Falcone. For *Terrifier 3*, they've brought in help in the form of special effects maestro Jason Baker's Callosum Studios, award-winning artist John Caglione Jr., and gore crew Tinsley Studio (plus visits from Tom Savini, as he cameos in the film).

Fantastical elements are still a part of *Terrifier 3*'s narrative, as we'll also become acquainted with the entity that has brought Art back – just not nearly as heavy-handed this time. As for the newly crowned fan-favorite Sienna, her potentiality as Art's counterpart is only beginning, as we'll watch how she discovers her role and the power she can wield. "I always wanted to create that mythic, medieval *Red Sonja*-type of character and put that into a slasher, and marry those two subgenres," Leone explains.

As *Terrifier 2*'s narrative made space for Sienna, Art the Clown took an ever-so-slight back seat. However, Thornton assures me that *Terrifier 3* will see more of a healthy balance between the two foes' POVs. "He's a little bit more confident this time around," he explains. "Even more so now, because he's come back from the dead a second time. You do see more complexity to him, especially when Sienna and he are inevitably going up against each other again. Lauren has upped her game this time – she really has a reason to fight."

Thornton's performance has also gained confidence with each sequel. "He's lived in my head for eight years now," Thornton says, adding that he can easily go in and out of character. "[Leone] allows me to do a lot of playing on my own – he just gives me the bare bones and which direction to go, and if he wants anything different, he'll tell me." Thornton suggests that audiences will discover more of the mythos behind Art the Clown, as some secrets (and footage) will be saved for a possible fourth film.

"Art and Sienna go [on] some journeys, and they end up in a very interesting place at the end," Thornton teases. "This has a very *Empire Strikes Back* feel at the end, and I'm thrilled with the finale of this film – I feel it's the fight you should've gotten with Laurie Strode and Michael Myers," alluding to fans' negative reactions to *Halloween Ends*.

The Christmas horror subgenre is reflected in Leone himself: warm and genial, contrasted with the most maniacal, violent ideas for his films that set them apart apart from other generic slasher fodder. The soft-spoken Leone says he's been called "a psychopath," and "a misogynist" by detractors – neither of which could be further from the truth, according to those on set. "He'll think of the worst kills and then give the tightest hugs," makeup artist Jackie Hughes tells me.

An avid reader of every review and every piece of writing or criticism about his films, Leone takes every critique into consideration, but he's ultimately committed to making the film that he wants to make. "I make a movie for myself first, and then I hope other people want to see it. I'm so proud of the work we did."

Thornton promises we're not ready: "Hold on to your butts!" 💀

LEONE AND THORNTON: ART-TISTIC COLLABORATORS.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CLOWN

FOR TERRIFIER 3, ART THE CLOWN HIMSELF (AKA DAVID HOWARD THORNTON) SITS DOWN FOR AN INTIMATE CHAT WITH HIS ONSCREEN NEMESIS.

BY LAUREN LAVERA

SIENNA IS BACK, WHICH MEANS SO IS FAN FAVORITE LAUREN LAVERA.

Lauren LaVera: For *Terrifier 2*, I did extensive research in preparation for Sienna: endless notes, journaling, backstory work. And I found that for *Terrifier 3*, all that groundwork had already been laid and my prep wasn't as extensive this time. Has your process changed or evolved since the first time?

David Howard Thornton: I think at this point, I am so comfortable with Art. I know who he is now, so I don't really do a lot of prep work besides just reading the script and just brainstorming ideas to bring with me to set. But when I did the first film, I definitely did a lot more prep work for myself. Of course, when I did my makeup test, several months before we started filming, I flat out asked Damien Leone to give me Art's whole entire backstory, and he was like, 'Oh, great question. I wish I had an answer.'

When I thought about it, Art was like an amalgamation of all the horror icons that had come before him. I also went back and watched a lot of great physical comedians as well. I always in my head have pictured Art as being the bastard child of Freddy Krueger and Harpo Marx, and I recently discovered, because I was curious, *What was Harpo's real name?* And it's Arthur.

That's so interesting.

As soon as I discovered it, I texted Damien, 'Dude, Harpo Marx's real name was Art. This is amazing,' because Harpo was one of my big inspirations for Art. So, I was like, 'This is perfect. This is absolutely perfect.'

I love that. As an actor, you need to be a bit spiritual, in my opinion. I have to be, certainly, because it's such a career of uncertainty. So, when synchronicities like that happen, it feels like, 'Oh, I'm on the right track,' doing the thing I'm supposed to do.

Exactly.

I know some people use their time in the makeup chair as a meditative experience. Do you feel like you're literally or metaphorically stepping into Art's skin? Does it help you embody the character, or are you just sitting there in discomfort hoping the time flies?

Starting out with Art, it's like I didn't feel the character until I was fully in makeup and wardrobe. When I first get into makeup, especially the first time I ever become the character, I sit in front of a mirror and try to make as many faces as I can, and go as broad as I can, because I want to see how things read, but also through that process I'm really able to find the character as well. I see where they live.

I was able to find a lot about Art that way. He's got his own space in the back of my head. I can just bring him out at a snap of the fingers if I have to, and then I can go right back to myself, but I think a lot of that comes from my stage days, because I would play multiple characters in shows and I had to switch between characters, sometimes have arguments with myself on stage.

So, I'm very used to switching in and out of character when I have to, but there's also those times where I'm quite the Chatty Cathy, and I'm just sitting there cracking jokes and just talking about world events and stuff like that. But when it comes to newer scenes, I will sometimes have to sit back and really reflect, and it's like, 'Okay, how is this affecting him here? How's he going to respond to this type of situation?' So, I do it on an as-needed basis.

You're so good at turning it on, turning it off, improvising. And this is such a collaborative art form. When you're an actor you can very rarely get to do 100% of what you prepared or imagined. You obviously need to listen to directors. Sometimes, you need to play off of the actor in front of you. What's it like having to be so collaborative in a role where you can't even speak, and having to be so flexible?

It could be a challenge at times. I think we've been blessed with the cast and crew where it's very freeing to experiment and collaborate, especially Damien. He's very willing to take ideas of the actors and even crew members on how to approach things, but he also has his ideas of how he wants things to look and he's really good at finding the balance, in working with everybody to find those balances. It's challenging when you don't have a script of lines to say. So, there's a lot of like, 'Okay, where do I go with this?' As you've seen so many times on set, I just go up to

PHOTOS BY JESSE KORMAN • COURTESY DARK AGE CINEMA

WORKS OF ART (FROM TOP TO BOTTOM): *TERRIFIER 2*'S BROOKE (KAILEY HYMAN); JENNIFER (KRSY FOX) BEFORE ART; MASS TRANSIT ENTHUSIASTS VICTORIA AND ART; JENNIFER AFTER ART.

"I ALWAYS IN MY HEAD HAVE PICTURED ART AS BEING THE BASTARD CHILD OF FREDDY KRUEGER AND HARPO MARX."

- DAVID HOWARD THORNTON

Damien, say, 'Oh, what am I doing today?' And we just discover it as we go along. It can definitely be a challenge, but for me, it's a fun challenge. There are definitely some scenes where I am given that liberty and freedom to play around.

Then we also have those moments where Damien knows exactly what he wants, especially when it comes to the horror elements of it, all the kill scenes. He knows exactly how he wants it to look, and sometimes my ideas will differ from his, and I've just had to go, 'Okay, no, I've got to trust Damien on this. He knows exactly how this needs to look.'

Damien is so specific in what he wants, but he also gives us room to play. He was so thoughtful in making a playlist for Sienna. I like to have playlists for my characters. It helps me understand them a bit better. So, I was curious what kind of music you think Art would listen to if he has a vibe, maybe when he's preparing or making his weapons.

I like to think he has a very, I guess you could say, sophisticated palate when it comes to music. I like the notion that he listens to classical music and jazz.

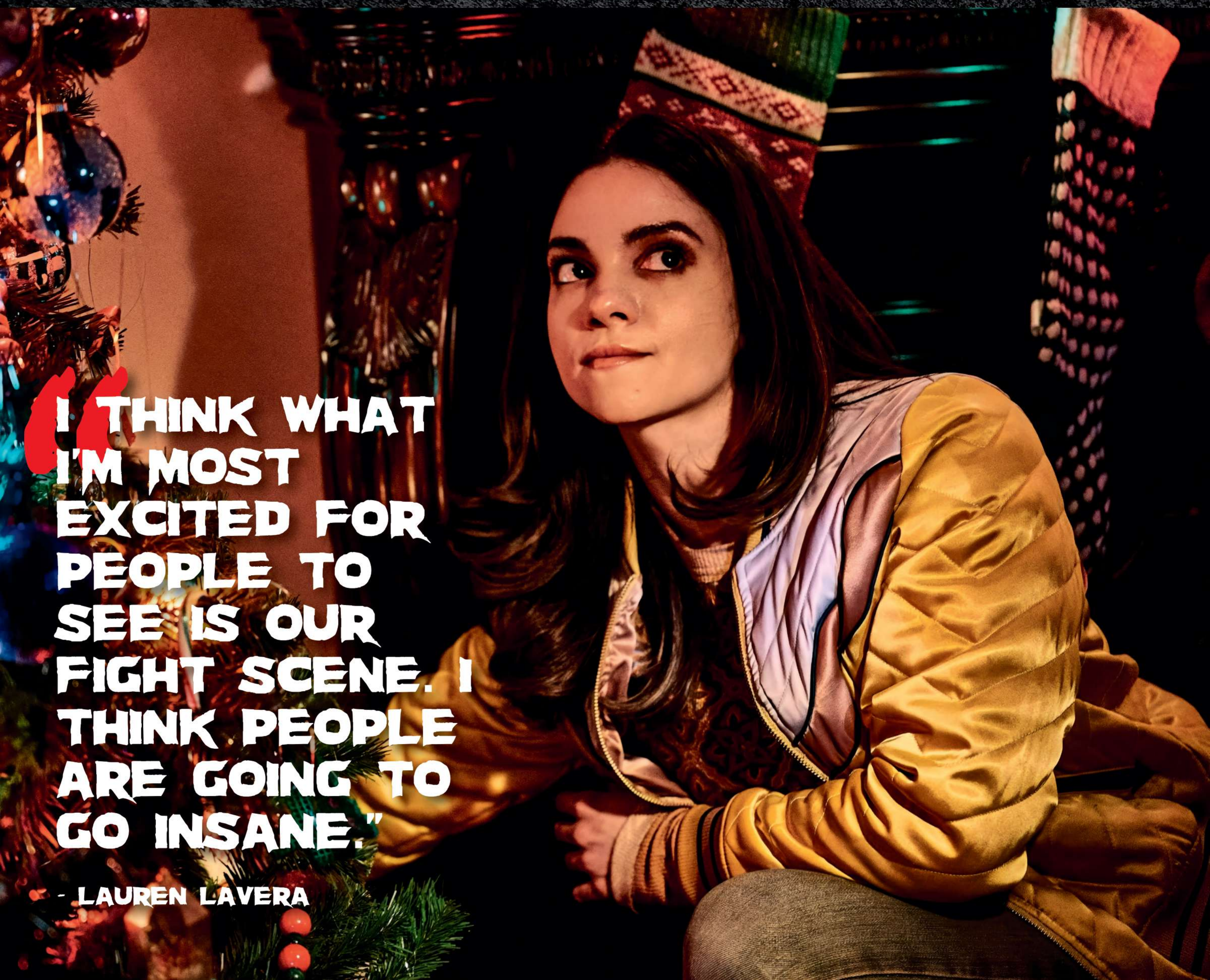
Jazz, I can totally see.

You see a little hint of that in the first film when he's in the truck and he's listened to that very discordant jazz music. Personally, I would sometimes listen to the song 'Waltz to the Death' from the first *Batman* film. It's the Joker's theme that helps me get in the mindset of Art. It's that music has that weird sort of manic wackiness to it that I feel encapsulates Art.

Then we also have those moments where Damien knows exactly what he wants, especially when it comes to the horror elements of it, all the kill scenes. He knows exactly how he wants it to look, and sometimes my ideas will differ from his, and I've just had to go, 'Okay, no, I've got to trust Damien on this. He knows exactly how this needs to look.'

Before we started really delving into becoming actors, we both had stable careers that had nothing to do with the industry. What was that transition like for you in deciding, 'Okay, I'm going to quit my current secure, stable, consistent job as a teacher and pursue this thing that feels like a one-in-a-million chance'?

I was going through a lot of trauma at that point, because I had just lost my mom a year before to cancer and then that month that I went in to do my internship, I lost my grandmother, my dog, a friend that committed suicide.



My whole life was in disarray and I was very unhappy. I was doing story time with my students one day, doing funny little voices for the characters, and they were having so much fun with it. That's when I realized that this is what I really enjoyed doing. I loved entertaining people. I was like, 'This is what I'm missing in my life right now is this kind of joy and this kind of fulfillment,' and I decided then and there that I should pursue acting as a career.

I talked to my dad that night. I thought he was going to fight me on it, but he was like, 'No, your mother and I always thought you should have been an actor. We just didn't want to tell you what to do with your life, so you go pursue the things you want to do, but go ahead and finish up your degree.' So, that's what I did.

I was a high-end optician. I had just gotten married, and my grandmother had fallen ill. She really helped raise me; she was one of the main reasons why I got into acting. My grandmother always wanted to be an actress. Instead, she settled down and had a bunch of kids, and now she was on her deathbed. Obviously I was devastated, but I was sitting next to her, thinking, 'You didn't get the chance to try.' After she passed, I was like, 'I'm going to start this pursuit of being an actor,' and obviously that came from a great deal of sadness.

The big lesson I learned from my mom's passing was that life is too short not to go out and do the things that you really want to do.

It's so funny that for both of us, it seemed like it was immense sadness that really pushed us into actually pursuing this thing that is just so difficult to pursue. It's a constant pursuit.

It was an escape for me too, because I focused mainly on stage work starting out, and those two or three hours when I was on stage, I was able to step away from my life and all the horrible things I was experiencing at that time. I was able to be someone else for just a few hours a day. It was therapy, and it saved me in a lot of ways.

Oh yeah, absolutely. Art saves lives. People don't realize it.

ART FOUND A CHAINSAW; SEEMS BAD! SIENNA (OPPOSITE PAGE) AGREES.

Yeah, ironically.

What's in your permanent mental scrapbook of this movie? For me, the practical effects were incredible this time. That scene when you get to choke me with the intestines and I have to bite through it...

Oh my God.

I remember when they asked me, they were like, 'We were thinking of maybe stuffing these intestines with Nutella to make it look like shit,' and I was like, 'Do *not* ruin Nutella for me.'

What I've really loved seeing is what you've done with Sienna in this film, capturing how she is dealing with trauma. Usually in other films with final girls when they come back, they're usually fine. 'Okay, this bad thing happened to me, but I'm functioning well in society,' and Sienna is *not*.

Thank you. Yeah, Sienna is a bit unhinged this time, but it's so interesting and fun to play. Honestly, and I think this is just the child in me, I think what I'm most excited for people to see is our fight scene. I think people are going to go insane.

I'm so excited for everybody to see that part too, because, oh my gosh, as grueling as that week was, that was so much fun to do. I mean, not just that fight, just that whole entire ending to the film.

What are your other favorite memories on this one?

We worked with people that I have looked up to my whole entire life, and I had a moment. It was after the big day that we filmed with Clint [Howard] and Danny [Roebuck] and Brad [Stryker]. I was in the cab after wrap, and I started to tear up because I just couldn't believe that I was actually able to do my craft with actors that I have respected for so long, and I was seen as an equal to them instead of just a fan. 'I am actually doing it.' It was such a profound thing. I remember thinking, 'I hope this guy is driving me right now and doesn't see me back here, crying and covered in blood.' 💀

Rosemary's Predecessor

A conversation with the director of Apartment 7A

By Arkasha Stevenson

(Note from guest editor Richard Newby: When I learned Natalie Erika James was directing a prequel to Rosemary's Baby, *I decided there was no one better to pick her brain about* Apartment 7A *than a filmmaker who's been through a similar journey of creating a masterful prequel to a beloved classic,* The First Omen*'s Arkasha Stevenson. As the following interview illustrates, I think I was correct, as the two filmmakers delve deeply into a complex, uniquely shared experience.)*

Arkasha Stevenson: I'm a huge fan of *Relic*, and when I heard that you were doing the prequel to *Rosemary's Baby*, I just flipped! *Apartment 7A* was absolutely nothing like what I expected, and I'm so thrilled to pick your brain.

Natalie Erika James: Thanks! I really loved *The First Omen*. You did such an incredible job.

AS: On our film, we had all these huge conversations about how to approach these very sacred texts of horror. One thing we talked about was approaching it as almost a sub-subgenre, going a little deeper and trying to look at it through a totally different lens. When I got to see your film and saw that you went about it through the lens of a musical, I was just blown away.

NEJ: I don't know if you had a similar feeling, but when I was first approached about this prequel, I definitely had my concerns. I wouldn't have taken a remake of *Rosemary's Baby* on in any way, but the idea of playing with the characters and the world appealed to me. The key point of difference that really spoke to me was the emotional journey. In the original, Rosemary starts as a hapless victim, in a way, who slowly uncovers the conspiracy around her. Whereas for our character, Terry, there's a sense that she kind of takes part in the Faustian exchange, a space that Rosemary's husband Guy inhabits in the first film. Terry almost functions as both characters.

To that end, setting it in this world of 1960s Broadway gave her a kind of ambition that the coven plays into or takes advantage of. That 1960s world was already there when I came on board. I was drawn in by the notion of bringing in these larger-than-life musical theater elements to play on the horror. I think it's almost true to the original in that way. What struck me about the original film was how deftly it delves into someone's psyche, you know, in the dream sequences and bringing in Rosemary's childhood. We wanted to do something similar in the way Terry experiences the horror around her. It's colored by her fixation on musical theater.

AS: It's such an interesting way into her subjectivity. Between Terry's drug addiction and these very fantastical musical theater elements, you never really know when you have a foot on the ground and what's the reality. It gives you this sense of disorientation that makes you align with her. You don't quite know if she's being gaslit or if this is part of her fantasy. It heightened the horror in the sense that I had this really wild experience with the assault scene that I wanted to ask you about. I'm a huge fan of Busby Berkeley, and it felt like that sequence was clearly inspired by him. I associate Busby Berkeley with such joy and happiness, and I got swept up in the really ornate musical nature of it all. Only afterward did I realize, *Oh my God, she did a Busby Berkeley rape scene*, and it added this completely new layer of horror. I almost felt complicit because I was enjoying the choreography.

NEJ: I really wanted this feeling of pulling the wool over the audience's eyes. And you're right, the sequence itself plays rape as entertainment. For Terry, it's almost like we're in her psyche so deep, and her brain's trying to protect her from the reality of the situation. Only after the fact do we see the real-world repercussions and the cracks within her fantasies. What you're saying about the audience being complicit also extends to how Terry is made to feel about her role. She thinks she can play the game, but she doesn't realize how the cards are stacked against her. I'm glad that came across.

AS: I'm a really big *Showgirls* fan. Have you seen *Showgirls*?

"We deviated from the original enough to hopefully lead an audience to wonder what happens next."

- Natalie Erika James

PHOTOS BY GARETH GATRELL COURTESY PARAMOUNT PICTURES

IN *APARTMENT 7A*, JULIA GARNER REIMAGINES VICTORIA VETRI'S ROLE OF TERRY IN *ROSEMARY'S BABY*.

NEJ: I have. So great!

AS: There's this podcast by Karina Longworth [*You Must Remember This*], and she talks about these scenes in *Showgirls*, and how it relates to the way we depict violence and interpret it on screen, and how there's constantly this safety net of theatrics. There's one scene of a Las Vegas performance where there's a choreographed gang rape. As the viewer, you don't realize how violent what you're seeing is because of all the theatrics. Later, at the end of the film, there's that horrible, brutal gang rape. There's a confronting message about how complicit we are as viewers and as filmmakers, and how careful we need to be about the depiction of violence. I think that this scene [in *Apartment 7A*] is going to create a lot of conversation about that. It excited me because that was also something we were talking about for *The First Omen*.

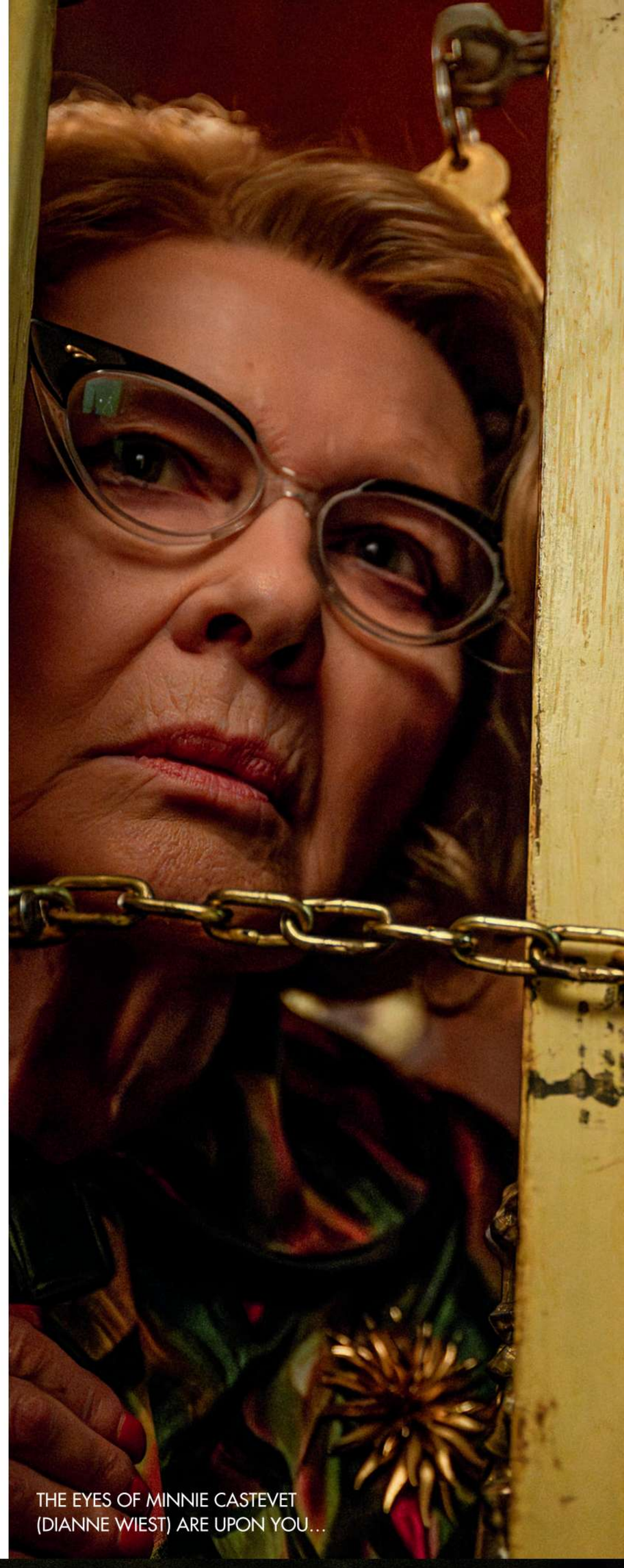
NEJ: I was going to ask about your approach to *The First Omen*.

AS: It's really tricky, right? You don't want to dilute the imagery, but you also don't want to be gratuitous. We tried to use a soundscape to imply the action, and very personal images that had to do with the female body, like seeing [Margaret's] breath through her stomach or the mask she wore. We tried to keep it very human.

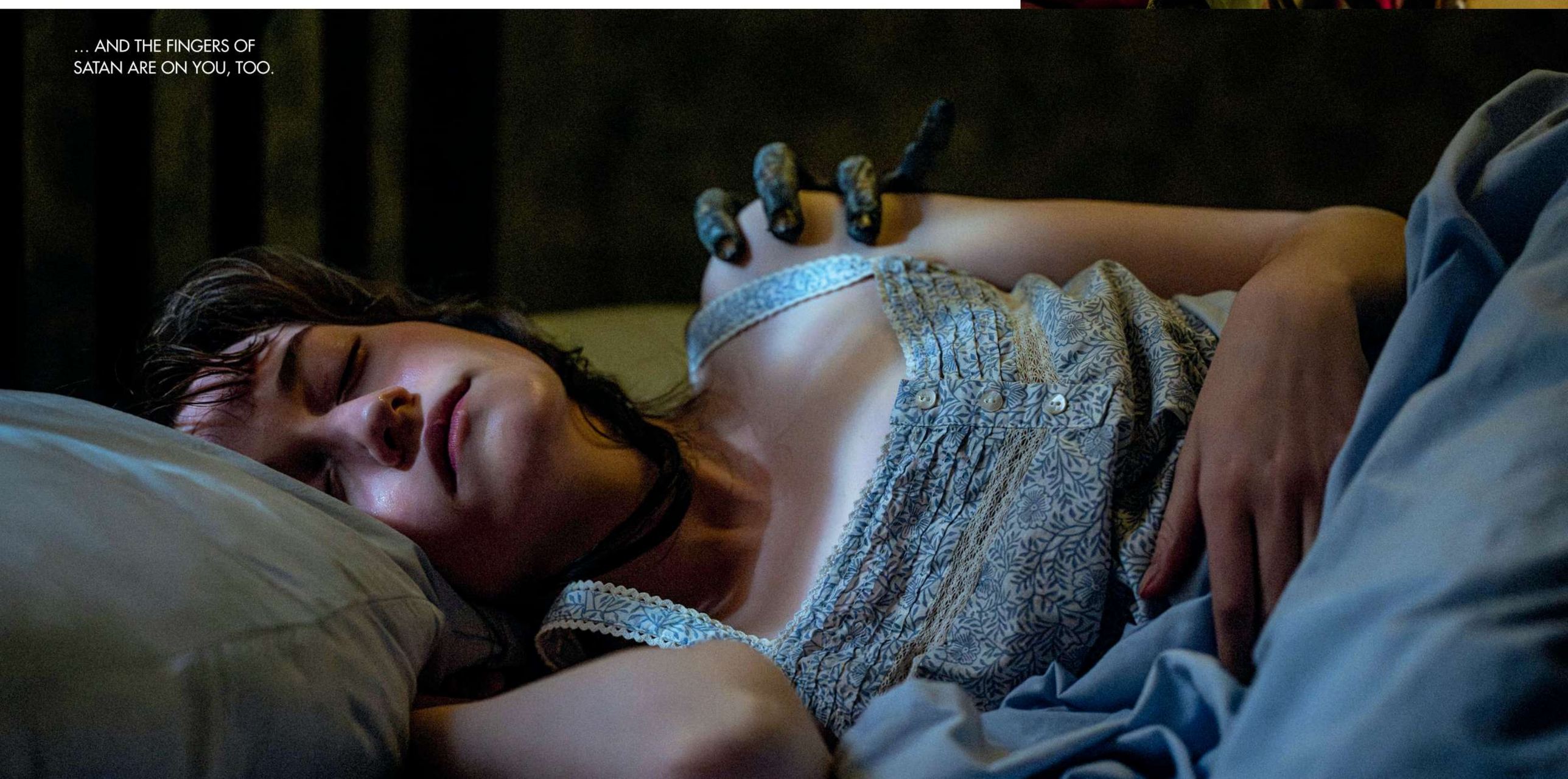
NEJ: I really wanted to connect the two sequences through dance in a way, even though they're very different. One is so much about the loss of power and the taking away of bodily autonomy. And then for Terry at the end, she is coming back to herself, coming back to claim her power, and coming back to feeling within her body. I think dance, while it is super fantastical to do it through the Busby Berkeley nightmarish fantasy, relates so much to movement and restriction and how you're able to have agency in how you move within a space.

AS: The ending was so powerful because that message is so clear. You strangely feel empowered because this is the first moment of real clarity she has. Using 'Be My Baby' by The Ronettes was so brilliant because it's a song by a woman who was essentially held captive and gaslit by her husband and had to break free.

NEJ: That one was a spark of genius from Julia Garner. We spoke about Ronnie Spector in the first conversation we had. It all came full circle in this beautiful way. There's so much rehearsal that goes into coming up with the choreography because it was very much driven by Julia as well, and we wanted to bring in moves she felt embodied by, rather than dictate something to her. I drew a lot of inspiration from films like *Beau Travail*, *Another Round*, and Bong Joon-ho's



THE EYES OF MINNIE CASTEVET (DIANNE WIEST) ARE UPON YOU...



... AND THE FINGERS OF SATAN ARE ON YOU, TOO.

ROSEMARY'S BABY VIEWERS MIGHT THINK THEY KNOW TERRY'S STORY, BUT *APARTMENT 7A* HAS SOME SURPRISES IN STORE.

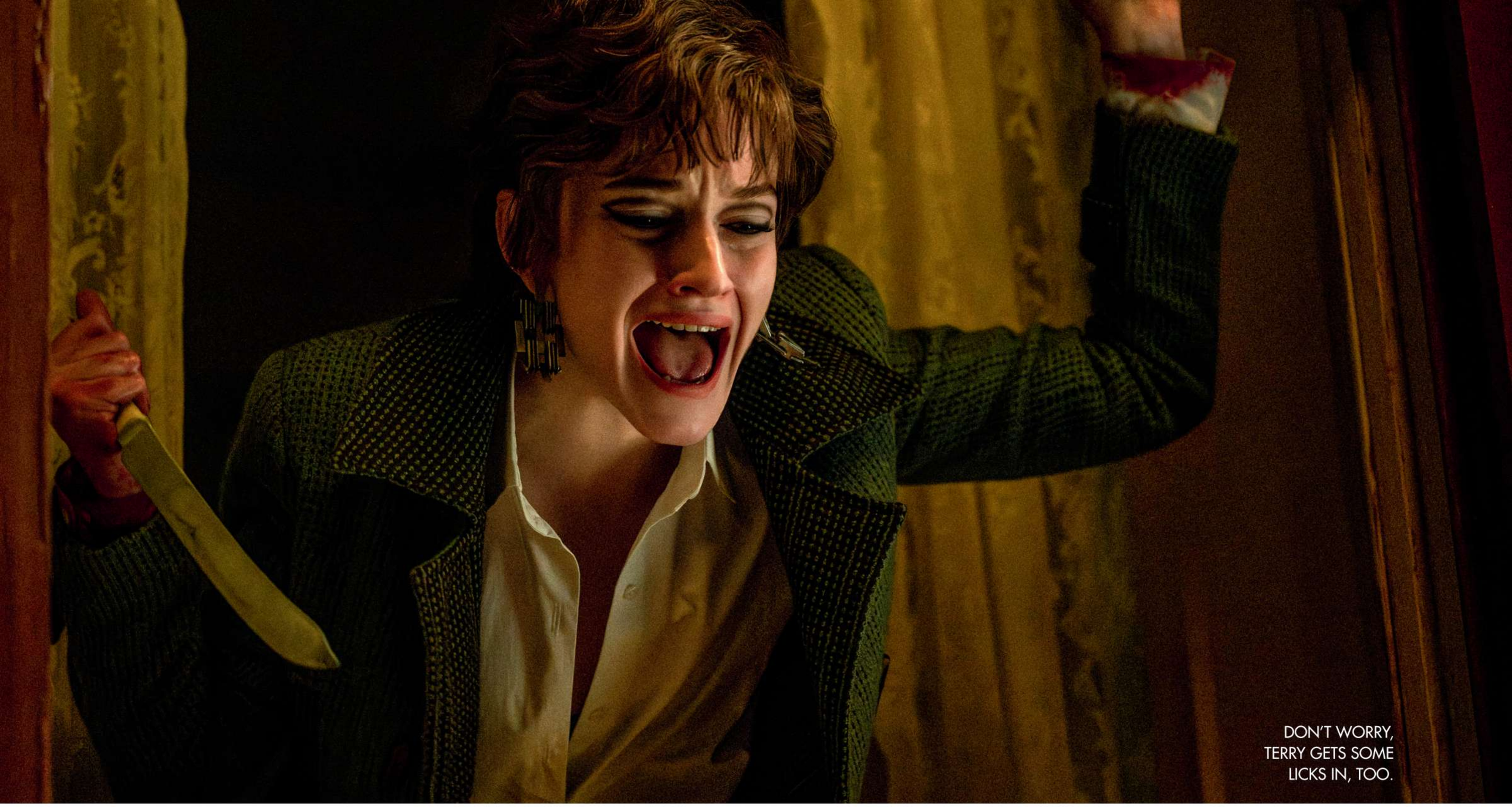
Mother. We actually started with the *Beau Travail* track 'Rhythm of the Night' during rehearsal, and then eventually Julia was like, 'Why don't we do this?' We were looking for something that the character would've listened to at the time, so it felt very much like an anthem for Terry. The narrative behind 'Be My Baby,' the heartbreaking nature of it, and the strength of it perfectly matched her performance.

AS: I love that *Beau Travail* is the inspiration for that final scene. Because of that movie, whenever I hear that song I feel like I have to dance to it.

NEJ: What a track! I read that *Rosemary's Baby* was the first horror film that you ever saw, and obviously, there are parallels to *The First Omen*, but there were a lot of visual references as well.

AS: I watched *The Exorcist*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *The Omen* when I was way too young, and didn't fully understand I was watching movies. You know, you just think that you're spying on people in a weird way. There are so many parallels between *The First Omen* and *Rosemary's Baby*, and it is interesting that there are so many films right now about female bodily autonomy. In both of our films, we talk very subtly about this division between generations, old and young, and the chaos and the threat that's creating for young women. Even on a subconscious level, it's hard not to become protective of Mia Farrow's character. She's so childlike. Even in youth, on a very gut level you understand how horribly she's being gaslit and you connect with her. *Rosemary's Baby* tells you what's happening very early on, and still, you are in it with her, wanting to believe she'll make it through this. With both of our films, the ending is baked in. Everybody knows how the movie's going to end, right? So how do you create the horror and the suspense?

NEJ: Your way in is through the character, and it's not so much about what happens, but how it's experienced. It's certainly a challenge. It's more about audience expectations and what an audience knows. In



DON'T WORRY, TERRY GETS SOME LICKS IN, TOO.

Rosemary's Baby, there's still a suspension of belief about whether this is real. Is she hysterical? Is it in her mind? Whereas coming into a prequel, you know there's some reality to the horror that's happening. In the writing of it, there has to be enough emotional truth to what the character is going through that you're still riveted. I still think there's mystery, or a sense of narrative propulsion, a sense of something larger than what's already there, that you have to think about. For us, that was expanding the mythology a bit in terms of how the coven's plans are carried out. We deviated from the original enough to hopefully lead an audience to wonder what happens next. But there's also a joy in connecting the dots too, in terms of Easter eggs and how things link back together. Was that a similar thing for you?

AS: It is so difficult because if everybody knows how you're going to end, you want to try and explain *why* during the course of the film. It was so interesting what you did, and maybe I'm reading into this a bit, but you had that famous headline — 'Is God Dead?' — in Terry's dream, and then the radio broadcast about all the riots and the violence. You start to get an understanding of why [the coven] would want to give birth to the Antichrist. In terms of audience engagement and propulsion, approaching this story through a musical lens almost brought this sense of fantasy to the film, where you didn't know if she was a completely reliable narrator at times. You have this pan in the dressing room and she sees herself in the mirror, and then when you pan to the side mirror, she's pregnant. It's just a very realistic fear for women, that *Oh my God, am I pregnant?* moment. It was very fun how you played with that.

And it's brilliant that her family ran a slaughterhouse. You meet Terry. You know she's going to die by the end of the film. Because of that, she takes on this very tragic, haunted quality. And then you hear that detail and you think, *Oh gosh, she cannot escape her fate.*

NEJ: Absolutely. The parallel of the women within that entertainment industry being like cattle or pigs drawn to slaughter is very much there from the start. Thanks for picking that out.

AS: I was thrilled by Julia's performance in this and what you guys did with *Apartment 7A*. It was like taking *Rosemary's Baby*, the planet, and rotating it a little bit and seeing all these different sides of everyone, which was so exciting. Hats off to you guys!

NEJ: Again, such a huge fan of *The First Omen* and can't wait to see what you do next. 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

DIRECTOR AND CO-WRITER NATALIE ERIKA JAMES PLACED THE WORLD OF *APARTMENT 7A* IN 1960S BROADWAY TO BRING IN "LARGER-THAN-LIFE MUSICAL THEATER ELEMENTS" ALONGSIDE THE HORROR.

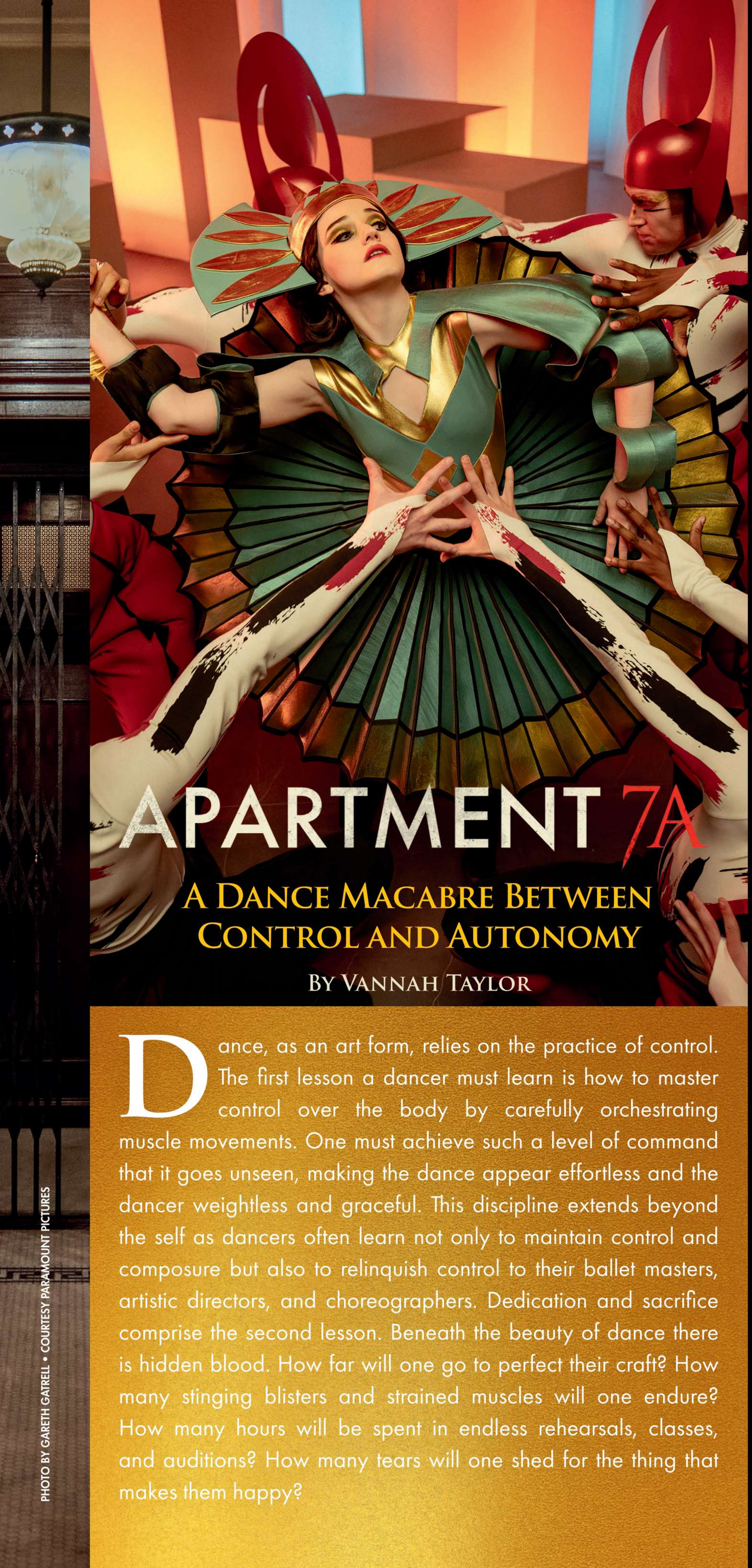


PHOTO BY GARETH GATRELL • COURTESY PARAMOUNT PICTURES

APARTMENT 7A

A DANCE MACABRE BETWEEN CONTROL AND AUTONOMY

BY VANNAH TAYLOR

Dance, as an art form, relies on the practice of control. The first lesson a dancer must learn is how to master control over the body by carefully orchestrating muscle movements. One must achieve such a level of command that it goes unseen, making the dance appear effortless and the dancer weightless and graceful. This discipline extends beyond the self as dancers often learn not only to maintain control and composure but also to relinquish control to their ballet masters, artistic directors, and choreographers. Dedication and sacrifice comprise the second lesson. Beneath the beauty of dance there is hidden blood. How far will one go to perfect their craft? How many stinging blisters and strained muscles will one endure? How many hours will be spent in endless rehearsals, classes, and auditions? How many tears will one shed for the thing that makes them happy?

The dual physical and psychological torment in the lives of dancers lends itself terrifically to exploration through the lens of horror. The most recent addition to the canon of dancer-focused horror films is Natalie Erika James's *Apartment 7A*, a prequel to *Rosemary's Baby*. But where does dance fit into the world of *Rosemary's Baby*?

Apartment 7A takes us back to 1965 New York and follows Terry Gionoffrio (Julia Garner), a memorable name from Rosemary's time in the laundry room of the Bramford. Terry is a dancer down on her luck, tirelessly trying to make it after her world came tumbling down from a broken ankle. After making her way to the Bramford in hopes of changing the mind of Alan Marchand (Jim Sturgess), the director of the show for which she recently auditioned, she becomes acquainted with Roman and Minnie Castevet (Kevin McNally and Dianne Wiest), who take her under their wings. But dance is not just how she becomes entangled in this odd couple's web, it is an element of her character that clues the audience into the themes of the struggle for control and bodily autonomy – themes that are the primary focus of *Rosemary's Baby*.

Set in 1966, *Rosemary's Baby* takes place during a time of radical social change, especially in the realm of women's rights, reproduction, and arguments over privacy and bodily autonomy. One of these paramount changes came in the form of the first contraceptive pill, approved by the FDA in 1960, providing the first step in allowing pregnancy to be a "choice" for women given that abortion was still widely illegal. Concurrently, traditional views on childbirth and prenatal care were being challenged, with new technologies and practices becoming more widely available in obstetrics and gynecology. Not to mention that just a year prior to the events of *Rosemary's Baby*, the Supreme Court ruled the use of contraception by married couples to be protected under a right to privacy in the landmark case *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965). However, with the medical field being male-dominated and legalities relying heavily on a woman's marital status, women still felt like pawns in the world of men even if there existed the illusion of choice. Rosemary chillingly represented the complexities that resulted from this disconnect.

IN *APARTMENT 7A*, TERRY (JULIA GARNER) FINISHES A DANCE STARTED BY ROSEMARY (MIA FARROW) IN *ROSEMARY'S BABY*.

DANCE SCENES HAVE BEEN USED OVER THE YEARS TO TRANSLATE A POSSESSION-LIKE LOSS OF CONTROL OVER THE BODY.

Even for a woman who wants a child, the sacrifice of pregnancy and childbirth can be overwhelming, especially when you are at the will of a husband and doctor who have all the power over decisions made about your body. It seems insane to think that many of the same conversations are being had today, echoing this pre-*Roe v. Wade* story. But with the overturning of this historic case, it is no wonder that the Castevets are returning to our screens.

The Castevets are an eccentric couple with sinister plans, not just to use a newborn baby for their Satanic rituals, but to breed the spawn of Satan himself. In the original film, the ritual that impregnates Rosemary happens within a surreal fever dream, and *Apartment 7A* is no different. This time, there is a distinct performance quality, like watching a musical dance number, as Terry is guided by a chorus line of cult members while she toes the line of consciousness. The ethereal quality of dance pairs brilliantly with dream sequences, and mimicking the flow state that can be achieved while dancing, giving a dancer the feeling of being possessed or overtaken by the music. As a result, numerous infamous dance scenes over the years have been used to translate a possession-like loss of control over the body. Angela's dance in *Night of the Demons* is the onset of the film's demonic possession, and Anna's writhing on the subway floor in *Possession* could be considered a macabre dance number in its own right. Dance as a religious and ritualistic practice has also been dramatized in films like *Midsommar* – reminiscent of the ballet and orchestral work *The Rite of Spring*, a choreographed depiction of Russian pagan rituals. Most importantly, dancing specifically as spell work executed by a cult of witches can also be seen in both the 1977 and 2018 versions of *Suspiria*. In *Suspiria* (2018), Susie dances for Madame Blanc during a rehearsal from which Olga has fled. During this sequence, Susie's movements become like incantations that ravage Olga's body from another room. This is ultimately how Susie takes her place not just in the dance company but within the coven. Similarly in *Apartment 7A*, another dancer who mocks Terry as "the girl who fell" becomes a voodoo doll of sorts and is knocked out of her spot to allow Terry to come to power – just as Guy gets his big break when another actor mysteriously goes blind.

Despite being taught that you have to be in complete control of your body when dancing, these are the ways that dance has been shown to represent the body being taken out of your control by an outside party. Because dancers often give their lives over to the craft, they are seen as relinquishing the control they have over themselves. This is why dance has been used not just in dream sequences and witchy spells

but also as a portrayal of the abuse of power over dancers.

Black Swan is the premier representation of the fatal consequences of giving yourself over completely, illustrating both how striving for perfection can kill you, as well as the abuse that can occur at the hands of others. In *Black Swan*, Nina is chosen to dance the role of the Swan Queen, infamous for the rigorous choreography as well as the skill it takes to portray both Odette, the white swan, and Odile, the black swan. The artistic director, Thomas, has a predatory nature and tries to push Nina sexually to get the performance he wants. Within the narrative, it seems to be a natural progression for a girl who has been raised to give up her entire life to ballet, deprived of autonomy by her mother, to give in to a man who is demanding more than he should. This degradation akin to a casting couch is also present for Terry in *Apartment 7A*. In her audition, Marchand sees the desperation in her and feeds into it by asking her to get on her knees and oink like a pig. While this is actually a test for her to exhibit that she has more dignity than to bend to his every command (like Thomas asking Nina to give him "more of that bite"), it is degrading nonetheless. Then, after she goes to see him at the Bramford to change his mind on the casting of the show, it is revealed that he is part of the Castavets' plans. Abusing his power to lure dancers to his apartment in the hope of furthering their careers, Marchand's character reveals what is truly meant by that "distinct inner quality" that Minnie and Roman tell Rosemary, Terry, and the many girls before them that they possess. Dancers are seen as desperate and easily manipulated because they have given up everything in their lives for their craft, making them perfect marks to be scouted and primed for a ritualistic purpose.

These girls, however, are not the perfect victims the Castevets hope them to be. In this new story, there is a shift away from a married couple eager to conceive, and away from a mousy Rosemary who is elated by the news of her pregnancy, to a young, single woman primarily focused on her career. By eliminating the character of Guy, *Apartment 7A* expands upon the themes of the original through the perspective of a character with whom many women today might more easily relate. Terry is a melding of Rosemary and Guy's characters, possessing Guy's ambitions to make it big in showbiz while still subject to the same social constraints as Rosemary. While Terry seems perfectly content as a childless and unmarried woman, it is no surprise that the push and pull between personal desires and a career is not a new topic in the realm of dancer-focused horror.

Laying the thematic foundation is Powell and Pressberger's *The Red Shoes*. Starring Scottish ballerina Moira Shearer, *The Red Shoes* is the dramatic tale of a woman torn between love and a career that demands all of her passion. After being invited to dance with Ballet Lermontov and star in a new production titled *The Ballet of the Red Shoes*, Vicky falls in love with the composer, Julian. After they both leave the company to marry, Vicky is invited back to reprise her role in *The Ballet of the Red Shoes*, but hostility between Julian and Lermontov causes Vicky to be torn between love and her need to dance. Either driven mad or somehow overtaken by the red shoes, she jumps to her death towards the train station from which Julian is set to depart. Through this act, Vicky ultimately releases herself from the control of the men arguing over what they believe her fate shall be – this is the same fate for Terry in the finale of *Apartment 7A*. Early in the film, Terry explains that amidst all the chaos and grief in her life, "Dancing was my escape… it's the only time I felt I had control over my life."

Naturally, in the film's final act, when it seems she has no choice but to give in to the influences of the Satanists that impregnated her, she begins to dance. Terry fills the space with movement, commanding the attention of the room, and finally takes back control. Knowing she cannot let them have her body, she then makes her final decision (much like Vicky's) to leap to her death on the pavement outside the Bramford. Despite her unfortunate fate, Terry remembered that first rule of dance – to maintain control. 💀

DAKOTA JOHNSON'S SUSIE HAS ALL THE RIGHT MOVES IN 2018'S *SUSPIRIA*.

PHOTO COURTESY PRIME VIDEO

MOMMA (HALLE BERRY) HUNTS FOR FOOD WHILE KEEPING AN EYE OUT FOR THE EVIL.

In *Never Let Go*, Halle Berry's character Momma has isolated her two kids and herself in a remote cabin in the woods, with the goal of protecting them from something deadly happening outside its walls. Halle Berry, the actor and producer, tells FANGORIA that the parallels to all-too-recent real-life events are no accident.

The Oscar-winning Ms. Berry clings to her kids and her sanity in her creepy, loaded new film, directed by Alexandre Aja.

NEVER LET GO

HALLE HANGS ON

By Phil Nobile Jr.

"We used all of that," Berry says of the pandemic and ensuing quarantine. "Because we had just gone through all of that, we all knew what it was like to be so isolated. That was a baked-in reality that we all had – every crew member."

So it should come as no surprise that there's a sort of lockdown hangover permeating Alexandre Aja's new film, a supernatural (or is it?), relatable (boy, is it) fable from writers Kevin Coughlin and Ryan Grassby about a single mother protecting her kids from a malevolent force outside their front door, holding the line via a secluded house in the woods, purportedly blessed by her ancestors to ward off evil spirits. As long as she and her two kids remain tethered to the house via a system of ropes, the mom tells her kids, they're safe.

But her two kids are growing up, and at least one of them is starting to question this belief system that their mom has ingrained in them. Is there really an external threat, or is their mother in the thrall of a psychotic – and dangerous – delusion? As the story proceeds, the boys poke and prod at their mom's narrative, unsure of the ultimate answer that awaits them.

That ambiguity appealed to Berry as an actress. "I usually play the mother trying to save her children at all costs, and she's like Supermom. So this was interesting for me to walk the line of still trying to be a good mother, but also a mother that was flawed, damaged." Berry was excited to explore the film's deeper themes, and this story was no place for a Supermom. "The movie is about generational trauma, and my character is only as good as the mothering that she had" (which, the film gradually reveals, was less than optimal).

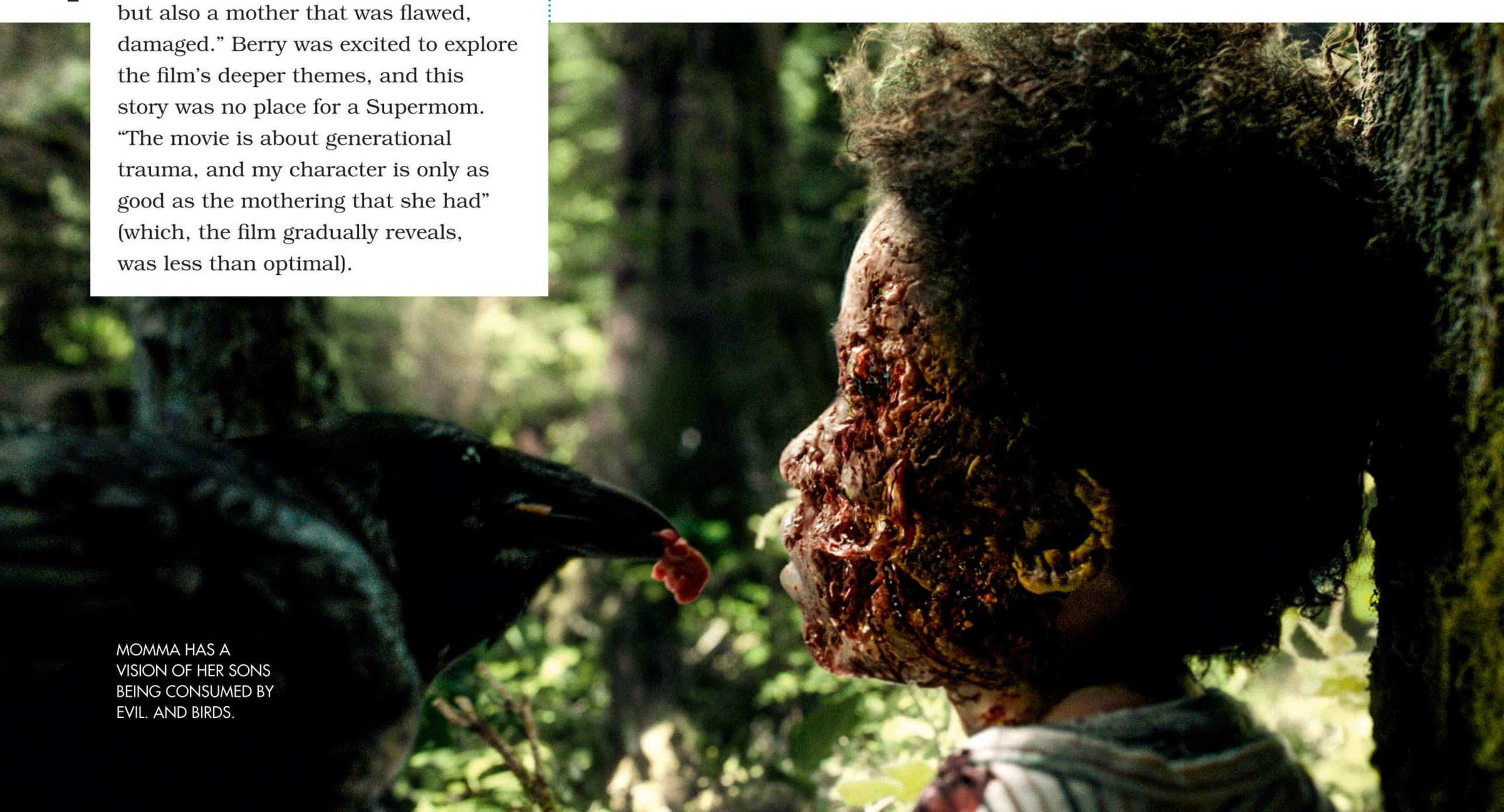
LITTLE GIRL LOST? ONE OF MOMMA'S VISIONS BEGS FOR HELP.

As her sons begin to question her sanity, Momma is visited by evil spirits that only she can see, and which take the form of her dead parents and late husband. (The reveal as to why those family members are no longer present casts further doubt on Momma's story and sanity.) Often the voice of common sense and reason in her films, Berry was excited to color outside the lines – and keep viewers guessing. "She's definitely crazy," Berry says. "The question is, was she always crazy, or was she driven crazy by the evil and by the circumstances in which they have to live? It was walking the line of dealing with mental health, but still having the audience question, 'Is she torturing these kids, or is she really being a loving mother and trying to protect them?'"

"SHE'S DEFINITELY CRAZY. THE QUESTION IS, WAS SHE ALWAYS CRAZY, OR WAS SHE DRIVEN CRAZY BY THE EVIL AND BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THEY HAVE TO LIVE?"
– HALLE BERRY

A film in which the supernatural threat may or may not be real is perhaps not new to horror fans. But viewers of *Never Let Go* might be shocked to see how long Berry, Aja & company keep that particular question in play. "Hopefully if we did our jobs right, as filmmakers, you don't know what's real," Berry teases. "That's sort of the water cooler talk: Was she? Was she not?"

PHOTOS BY LIANE HENTSCHER/ COURTESY OF LIONSGATE



MOMMA HAS A VISION OF HER SONS BEING CONSUMED BY EVIL. AND BIRDS.

THE WOODS SURROUNDING THE FAMILY'S HOUSE HOLD MANY SECRETS.

The film is a departure for the star in another way: it's the first film produced under the shingle of HalleHolly, her newly formed production company with producing partner Holly Jeter. It's impressive that they've chosen as their inaugural project not just a genre tale, not just a very-of-the-moment entry into the maternal horror trend ("I had no idea! Great that we're on trend!"), but one that required a ground-up level of world building — the kind that can make or break the reality of a horror film.

"That was all interesting to me, to figure out. Could we bring plausibility to this situation, and what would that look like? After 10 years, all your supplies diminish. What would the boys be wearing? Where would they get the clothes from? How did you dress them as babies? All of that stuff went into play, and it was a great psychological challenge for us to figure all that out."

Berry the producer also knew she wanted a top-notch director for the film, and Aja was an easy choice.

"*The Hills Have Eyes* was one of my favorite movies of his, so I knew that he understood the genre, and that he would bring all of that to it," Berry enthuses, "but it was also exciting to work with a filmmaker who wanted to try something new. I've worked with people who are doing the same thing over and over, sort of pumping it out. But because this was new for him, he was wildly invested and, I think, worked in a different way than he was used to in creating this... we call it our dark, nightmarish fairy tale."

The film is indeed new territory for Aja, who renders a heightened, beautiful environment in which the story unfolds. "Alex wanted to go down this new path. There's a sophistication to it," Berry says. "We talked about it; it was about creating a world that was gorgeous and spooky and had never been seen."

Gone is the cruel streak of *High Tension*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, and *Piranha 3D*, replaced here by a different kind of relentlessness, as the threat of starvation adds a practical dilemma to the family's more ethereal threats. Sure, there might be evil entities appearing in the form of strangers or

MOMMA AND HER BOYS NOLAN (PERCY DAGGS IV) & SAMUEL (ANTHONY B. JENKINS) TRY TO KEEP IT TOGETHER.

dead relatives, but the reality is, in their isolation, the family is reduced to eating bugs, frogs and tree bark to stay alive. Supernatural or not, their plight is a harrowing one.

Helping to sell that peril to the audience are Anthony B. Jenkins and Percy Daggs IV, two remarkable child actors. “They have to carry the film,” Berry says. “They're my only scene partners. We had to find kids that were kind of raw, in touch with their wild side. It's very hard to take kids who don't have a lot of experience or study and try to tell them, ‘Okay, act wild.’ These boys were highly intelligent, but wild and raw and they had their emotions right at their fingertips.”

Those gifts are called upon throughout the film, as the two sons must deal with not only the threat of evil entities clamoring for them outside the door, but more corporeal dilemmas like whether it’s time to kill and eat the family dog. The young boys’ performances ground the entire scenario in ways that are likely to rattle viewers. “That was really the deciding factor at the end of the day,” Berry says of Jenkins’ and Daggs’ casting. “Finding kids that really had the ability to access that kind of deep emotion and vulnerability.”

As previously alluded to by Berry, the COVID-19 pandemic also helped shape the performances of the two young co-stars. “The boys understood what it was like to be stuck at home, and what that would feel like – how close you get, how tense you get, and how emotions run high. But yet you also know that you desperately need each other.” The result is a kind of onscreen exorcism of the past five years, performed not just by the veteran actress, but two young actors who’ve been dealing with the pandemic and its aftereffects for half their lives.

“I would talk a lot with the boys about how they felt during the pandemic. And as kids, they kind of thought that might’ve been the end of the world. ‘Are we all going to die?’ They had a sense memory of what that felt like when they were going through it,” says Berry. Heavy subtext for the two young performers, perhaps, but as Berry asserts, “I think stories are how we grow and evolve, and I think this is a story kind of meant to help us put to bed, hopefully, that point in history.” 💀

PHOTOS BY LIANE HENTSCHER/ COURTESY OF LIONSGATE

HALLE’S HALLOWED HORROR

WE ASKED THE OSCAR-WINNING STAR AND PRODUCER OF THE UPCOMING *NEVER LET GO* TO LIST THE HORROR FILMS THAT MEAN THE MOST TO HER.

BY HALLE BERRY

I think about horror in terms of the stages of my life. When I was a kid, I really loved *The Shining*. That was my first foray into the genre, and that was horrific; the scariest thing I had ever seen. I lost a lot of hours, a lot of days thinking about that movie — a lot of sleepless nights. Jack Nicholson was the scariest human on the planet. I could never get those twins out of my mind.

It was an introduction, but that's also when I knew that it was something I loved. I loved the titillation, I loved what that did to my body. Even though it caused me sleepless nights, I loved being scared. So that's when I knew, “okay, I like this.”

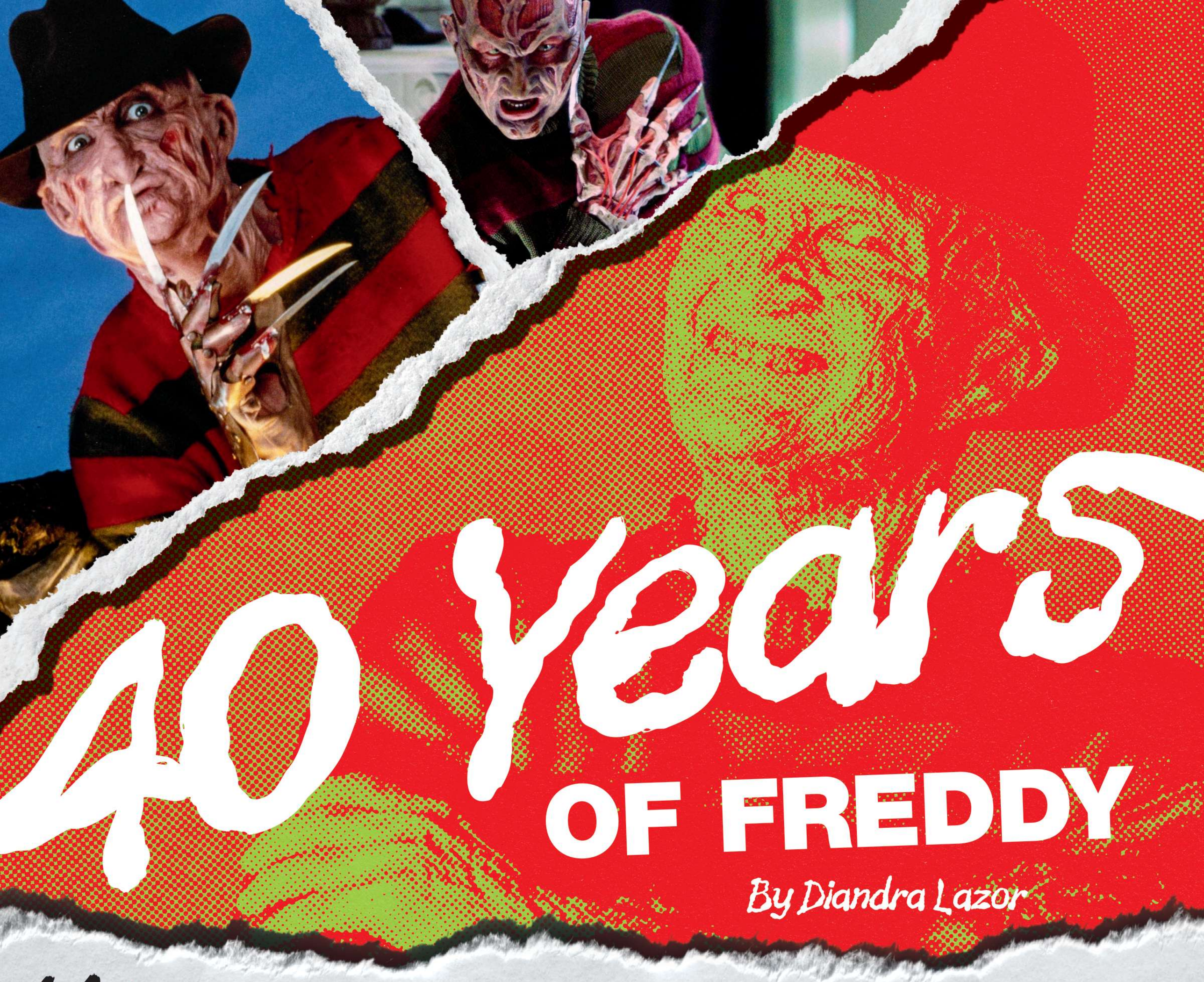
In the mid-‘80s, I remember really liking the *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Halloween* movies; Freddy Krueger and Michael Myers were neck-and-neck for me. These were my high school years, and I would go to the movies with my friends. It was always great to go in a group, and we loved just having the shit scared out of us together by the slasher movies that delivered blood, gore and scares.

And in those early slasher films, it was real people showing up and doing the killing, and there was something so scary about that as a teen. It wasn't evil lurking, or monsters or ghosts — it was people taking out people. It felt so real and personal.

In my adult life, I've been drawn more to psychological thrillers like *The Sixth Sense* and especially *The Others*, with Nicole Kidman and those children in the house. That isolation was not unlike this new movie of mine [*Never Let Go*], which is probably why I was drawn to it. I really loved the twist in *The Others*. It was scary, but in a more psychological way. And as I got older, I think that kind of horror became scarier to me than slashers.

I really loved *Get Out* and the themes of that movie. As a Black woman, the whole premise of that film just hit a core in me and terrified me.

A Quiet Place is a recent film that scared me, and that’s really stayed with me. The scenario was just horrific: I couldn't imagine being that mother with a baby, and not have the baby cry. I've had two, and that's not possible. 💀



40 Years OF FREDDY

By Diandra Lazor

"Every kid knows who Freddy is. He's like Santa Claus," Heather Langenkamp says in the 1994 meta film *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*. This statement is meant to underscore that the fictional Heather's son, Dylan (Miko Hughes), has every reason to know about the slasher icon, but it resonates beyond the film.

Can you recall the first time Freddy Krueger entered your world? Even before I watched any of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films, Freddy was already a figure in my nightmares with his dirty fedora, his tattered red-and-green sweater, his scarred face, and that unforgettable razor-fingered glove.

Freddy's influence is staggering: He's appeared in nine films (including the remake), a TV series, books, songs, comics, and documentaries. He's been referenced or spoofed in countless movies, shows, and media, not to mention the fan art and cosplays.

And though he hasn't appeared in a movie since 2010, his legacy endures. For horror enthusiasts, Freddy isn't just a character; he's a testament to the enduring power of fear and imagination. His presence is a shared experience, a dark thread that connects us all.

This year, we celebrate forty years since Freddy Krueger first slashed his way into our nightmares in 1984's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Since then, Robert Englund has been inseparable from his iconic alter-ego.

If you've seen his documentary (*Hollywood Dreams & Nightmares: The Robert Englund Story*), or flipped through his book (*Hollywood Monster: A Walk Down Elm Street With the Man of Your Dreams*), or even heard him speak at an event, you're already in on the not-so-secret origin story of Freddy Krueger.

But just in case, here's what Robert Englund remembers: "I didn't take any inspiration to my audition other than just trying to look different than a tan, 30-year-old guy," jokes Englund, who was born and raised on the sunny California coast. "I was living at the beach then and doing a lot of surfing, and my hair was long and blond."

Englund greased back his hair using some motor oil from under the hood of his old Datsun Roadster and put a little cigarette ash beneath his eyes. "It's an old theatre trick just to kind of make me look older or my eyes

look sunken a little bit, aged me a little bit," Englund explains.

Englund wanted to look "severe," and recalls buttoning his shirt all the way up to resemble a prison uniform. He walked in the room and engaged in a staring contest with Wes Craven, the writer and director of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

After landing the role, Englund took inspiration from Klaus Kinski in 1979's *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. "I think I borrowed a little bit of his posture, and he thrust his head forward a little bit, and the way he kept his hand up high with his long fingernails," Englund explains, "and I just thought, 'Well, I should probably do that with a Freddy glove.'"

Englund wanted to remove Freddy's fedora at some point to reveal the striking burn scars crafted by legendary special effects artist David Miller. "I knew I wanted to show off that great makeup and the bald head, and the separating burn sores that [Miller] had kind of put into the skull part of the makeup," says Englund. "I could see myself revealing that like Klaus Kinski was revealed in *Nosferatu*."

He also pulled some inspiration from Andrew Prine, his co-star in a 1979 TV movie called *Mind Over Murder*. Prine played a bald serial killer who shares a psychic connection with a young woman.

"Because I was in that and because I watched Andrew work, and because I worked with him later on in *V* and hung out with him, I think that he was subliminally in me," explains Englund. "I remember thinking of Andrew a little bit, the kind of way he held his head in that."

With roughly eight minutes of screen time and just a handful of lines in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Englund's portrayal was powerful enough to launch a franchise. As the series continued, Freddy transformed from a menace lurking in the shadows into a horror icon with a rockstar presence.

Even in the early stages, Englund says there were clear signs that *Nightmare* was destined to become a major success.

"I think I was at a film festival or an awards ceremony over in Europe for *V* and I was in my Armani tuxedo for the first time," recalls Englund. "I got up very, very early in the morning and we were across the street from a park, but all the stores were shuttered with those European shutters pulled down, and there was nothing for me to do but just walk around the park. And all the grandmothers were there doing this dawn patrol with the children in those giant, old-fashioned perambulators with the canopy top, and they recognized me. The grandmothers recognized me!"

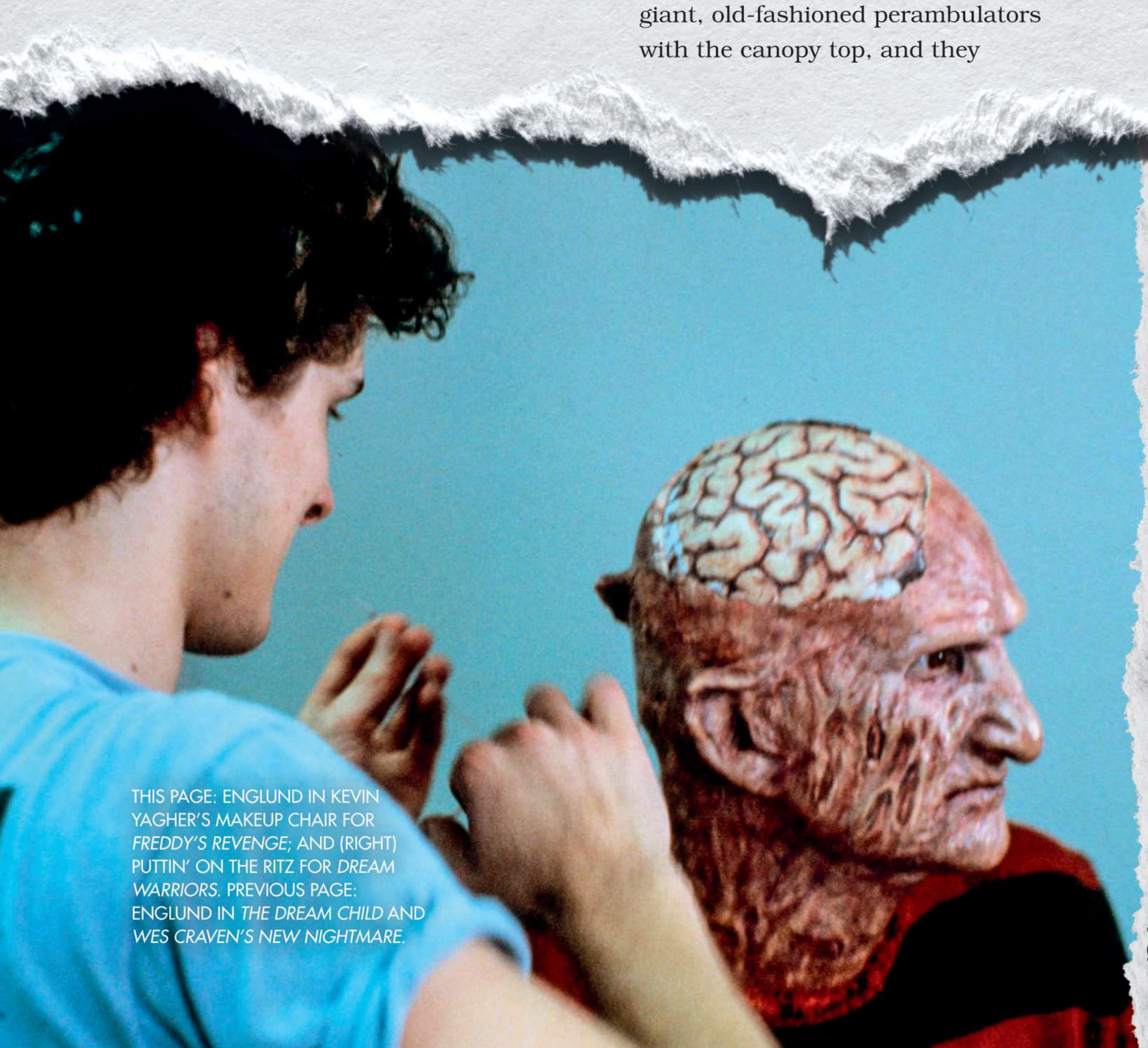
One of the things Englund loves most about his role in *Nightmare* is that it helped launch his international career. "That's just a great gift for an actor, because you can work all over the world," Englund says. "And even though it's been predominantly horror movies or thrillers, it's been a great experience to do over a dozen films in Europe just because of the success of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*."

At the time, actors in horror movies were underappreciated. "We didn't get a good table for a long time," Englund notes.

Freddy's international success also gave Englund a different perspective on horror.

"I've sat in countless hotel lobbies around the world for film festivals, publicity tours, and press junkets," Englund explains, "and what I learned, especially in Europe and in Japan, is that horror, science fiction, and fantasy films are beloved and taken a lot more seriously as a true art form."

"The horror film is still embraced, and there's not a judgment about it being a B-movie," Englund says, adding that the "B" stands for budget. "It's not a grade on quality as a lot of people think."



THIS PAGE: ENGLUND IN KEVIN YAGHER'S MAKEUP CHAIR FOR *FREDDY'S REVENGE*; AND (RIGHT) PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ FOR *DREAM WARRIORS*. PREVIOUS PAGE: ENGLUND IN *THE DREAM CHILD* AND *WES CRAVEN'S NEW NIGHTMARE*.

Englund says the press junkets in Europe and Japan were eye-opening. "It also helped me, along with advice I got from Wes [Craven], to respect the genre more," he explains. "Even though as a child, I had been a huge fanboy of horror, I'd taken another path when I was in the theatre and I had become kind of a snob. I wanted to do classics, avant-garde, and political theatre. And I don't think I was defensive about playing Freddy, but I'd sort of forgotten what it was like to be a child of the Saturday matinee."

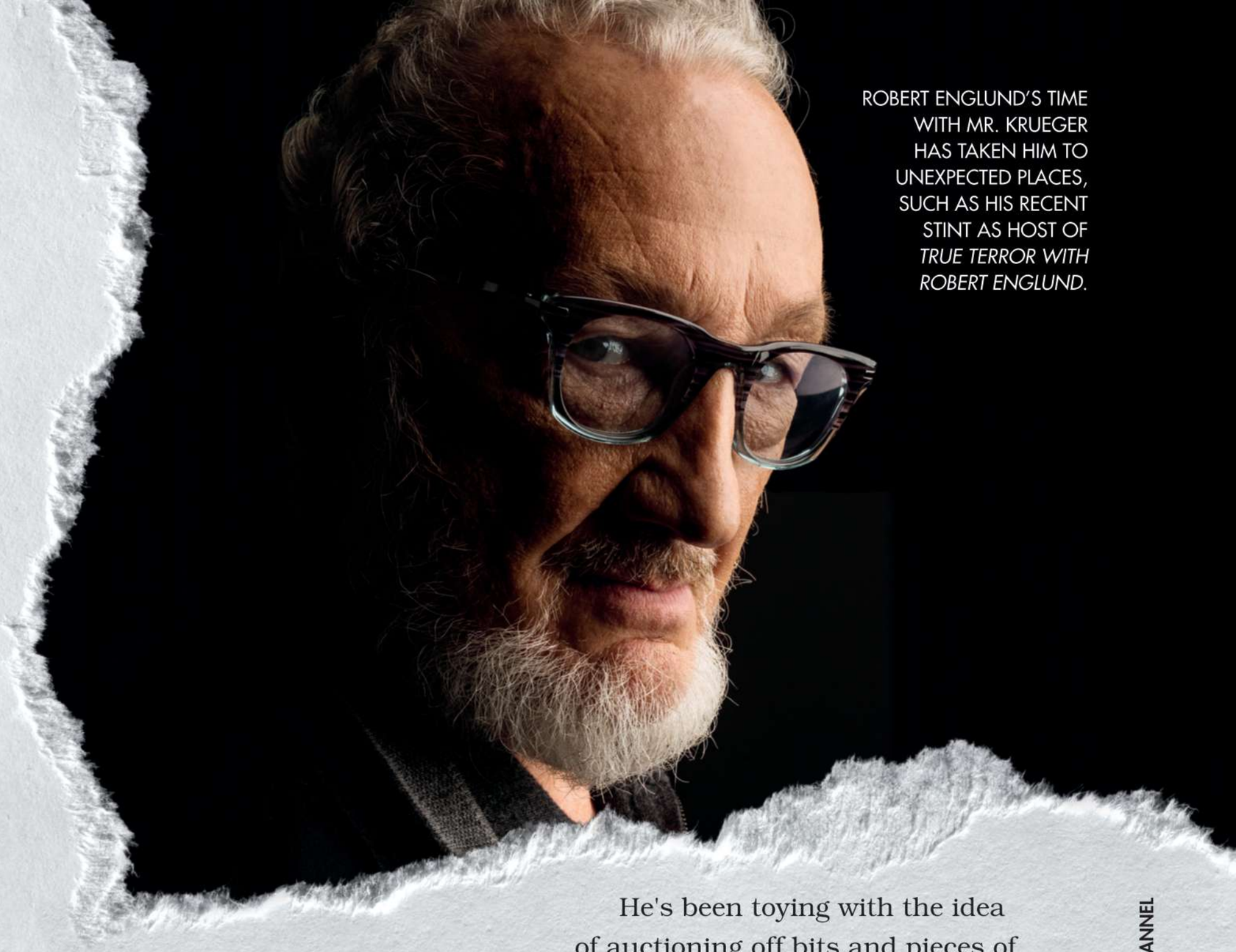
For the past 40 years, Englund has cherished his connection with Freddy. His personal collection of memorabilia, lovingly curated, is nestled among movie posters and photos of some of his most beloved actors.

"I have a couple of interesting things," Englund says of his collection. "I have the stuff that I like, which is *TIME* magazine articles and *Rolling Stone* photos and my favorite posters, and then just tons and tons of posters of all the movies I've done." He's especially fond of the posters from Europe and Asia. "I have a great Indonesian Freddy poster of Patricia Arquette with the Freddy worm," says Englund, referring to a poster for *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*.

Englund points out another favorite, a "very strange" poster from Italy. "There's a girl that looks like she's being suspended, like she's being pulled out of her bed, astral projecting, floating over the bed," Englund says. "And it's not Heather [Langenkamp]. It's that character, but it's not Heather. At the top of it is the claw, and it's the claw that eventually we used in *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*, 10 years later."

Englund suspects that someone eyeballed that poster and got the bright idea for the bone-and-blade fingers in *New Nightmare*, which also happens to be his favorite of the series.

Like any horror aficionado, Englund gets giddy talking about his favorite art. "That's the fanboy in me just going, 'Wow,' because it's like seeing a photo of you you've never seen before, from a press kit in Tokyo or Romania," he explains. "It's that thing where, as a celebrity or as an actor, you love that. We are all fanboys, too."



ROBERT ENGLUND'S TIME WITH MR. KRUEGER HAS TAKEN HIM TO UNEXPECTED PLACES, SUCH AS HIS RECENT STINT AS HOST OF *TRUE TERROR WITH ROBERT ENGLUND*.

Among Englund's unique treasures, one piece stands above the rest: a Gold Record for Alice Cooper's "Welcome to My Nightmare." "I do a Freddy laugh on it," says Englund, who calls the record "one of my prized possessions." Beyond his iconic status as a shock rocker, Cooper also has close ties to Freddy, including playing Freddy's tormented stepfather, Mr. Underwood, in *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*.

"For me, that's on so many levels because it's 'Welcome to My Nightmare' and it's Alice Cooper," Englund explains. "He gave it to me as a present. I see him a lot around Hollywood every once in a while."

As *Nightmare* marks its 40th year, Englund turned 77 this June. With age comes reflection, and Englund has begun contemplating the future of his personal collection over the next decade.

"I can't really make up my mind," Englund says, though he has considered the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. "Maybe they would want to come and just get some of the posters and some of the choice pieces of memorabilia just to have in their museum. Freddy Krueger and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* are cultural touchstones like Frankenstein, Dracula, the Wolf Man."

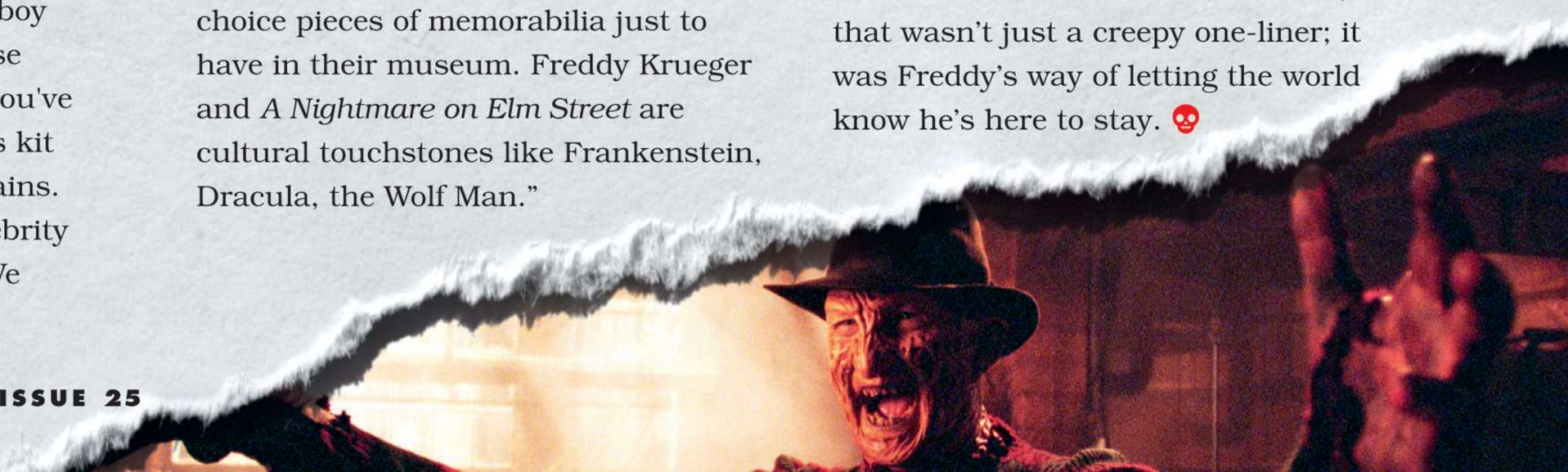
He's been toying with the idea of auctioning off bits and pieces of his collection, or giving it to Nancy, his wife, to handle as she wishes. Englund suspects he may have already gifted some of his best treasures to Planet Hollywood and the Hard Rock Cafe years ago. Still, he's got plenty of gems left.

"I'm getting older and I should make up my mind about this," Englund says. "I don't want you to think that it's, like, the best collection. Fans have shown me photos on their phones of their Freddy Krueger man-caves and there are people out there who have some great stuff."

Englund considers it "a happy accident" that *Nightmare* and Freddy have remained popular over the years, growing even more beloved thanks to advancements in technology and merchandising. With a sense of genuine appreciation, he acknowledges that Freddy will endure.

Thanks to Englund's incredible talent, Freddy has carved out a permanent place in movie history. And just in time for this milestone year, Englund is getting his very own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. When Freddy whispered "I am eternal" to Alice Johnson in *The Dream Master*, that wasn't just a creepy one-liner; it was Freddy's way of letting the world know he's here to stay.

PHOTO (TOP) BY MATT HARBICHT • COURTESY OF THE TRAVEL CHANNEL



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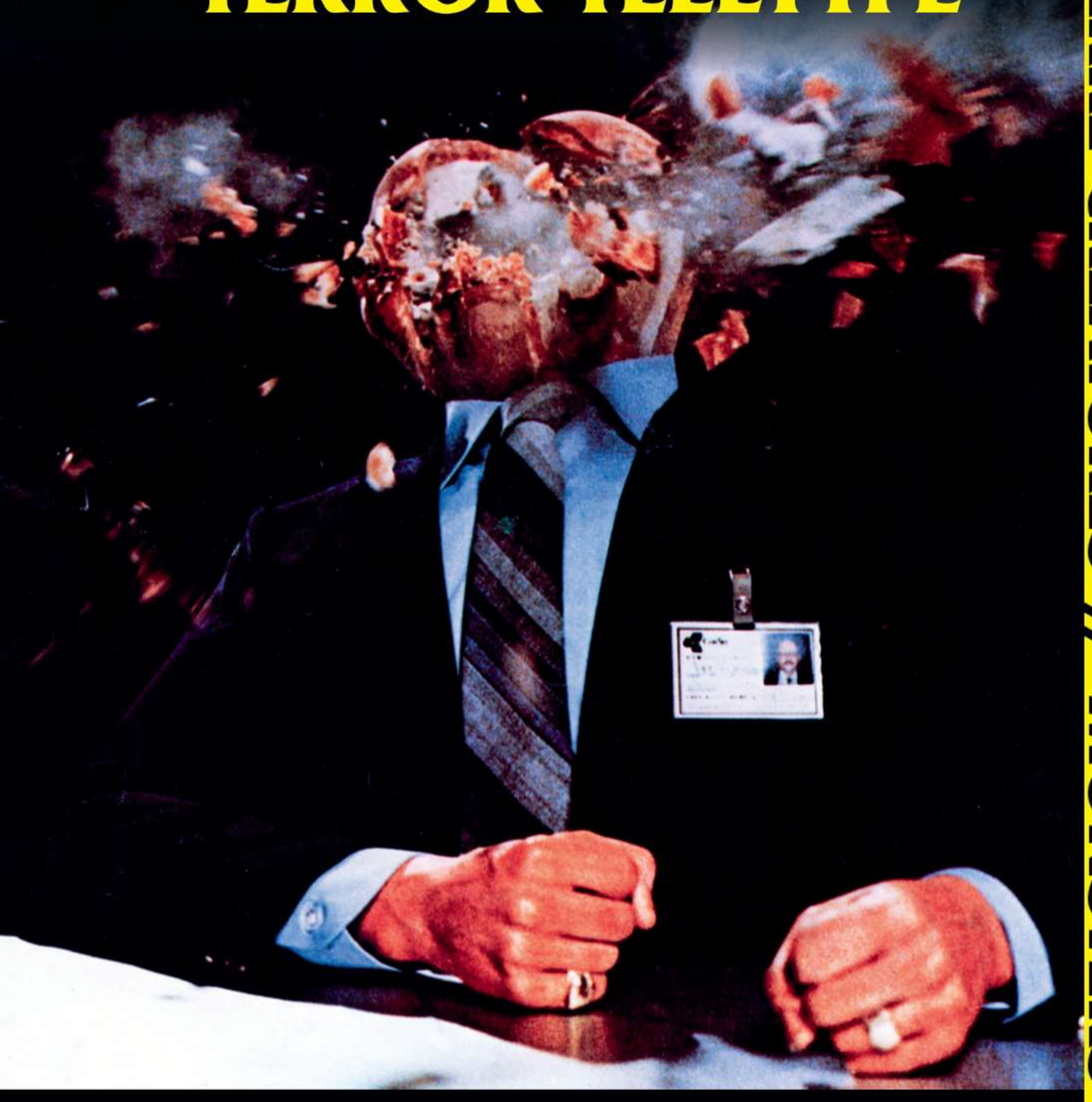

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FREDDY FOREVER

BY JOSEPH MADDREY

Frederick Charles Krueger has been haunting our dreams for four decades. How much of that journey did his creator, Wes Craven, anticipate?

During the final year of his life, Wes Craven said in two separate interviews that he expected his tombstone to identify him as the father of Freddy Krueger. The director revitalized the genre in three successive decades – with *Last House on the Left* in the 1970s, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in the '80s, and *Scream* in the '90s – but he regarded *Elm Street* as his most important and his most personal film. This was the film that gave him a career, while expressing his vision of what horror cinema could be.

HORROR

Freddy slashed his way into theaters in six American cities – New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Los Angeles, and San Francisco – on November 9, 1984. The indie film opened at #10, well below the #1 debut of the George Burns comedy *Oh God! You Devil!* But *Nightmare* earned more money per screen, and had more staying power. (You can almost hear Freddy quip, "This… is God.") By the following spring, the film had grossed over $25 million at the domestic box office, and was poised to become a bestseller on home video. The producers were already talking about a long-running franchise.

For children of the '80s, there would be no escaping Freddy Krueger. He inspired books, comics, talking dolls and trading cards. He had his own cable TV series (*Freddy's Nightmares*), his own video game (for 8-bit Nintendo), his own board game, several music videos ("Dream Warriors" by Dokken, "Are you Ready for Freddy?" by The Fat Boys, and "Nightmare on My Street" by DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince), not to mention his own 900 number. If you wandered into the Spencers gift shop at your local mall, you could buy a Freddy mask, Freddy claws, Freddy burn makeup, and a pinup poster of your favorite dream master. Who needs Cindy Crawford when you've got Robert Englund?

Wes Craven didn't imagine any of this. In contemporary interviews, he talked less about the iconic character he created than about the genre he was transforming. During an on-set interview for FANGORIA #40 (December 1984), he insisted, "This [film] isn't horror, really. It's more of a fantasy, an impressionistic thriller." It was a contentious statement to make to the premier horror film fan magazine, but not an uncommon sentiment among filmmakers at that time. The slasher craze inaugurated by *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* was over. Moral backlash against violent films in the neoconservative Reagan era was at fever pitch. Many genre filmmakers were looking to re-brand themselves and break the mold. Wes Craven succeeded.

Accounts of the making of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* usually begin with Wes' claim that he was inspired by a series of articles in the *L.A. Times*. Beginning in 1980, they connected a series of tragic and mysterious deaths among Hmong refugees in the United States. All were male, all relatively young, and all died in their sleep – for no apparent reason. One coroner offered a theoretical explanation: *bangungut* syndrome, a "sudden death" phenomenon in the Philippines, seemingly related to spiritual beliefs and the mind-body dichotomy. In essence: a mind that believes the body is being assaulted by a demon may actually cause the body's death.

Or, to put it another way: *fear kills*.

These articles prompted Craven to start writing, but *A Nightmare on Elm Street* had its origins much earlier in his life. Many fans know the story of the filmmaker's encounters with a sadistic drunk who inspired Freddy's look, and a schoolyard bully who gave him his name. But those experiences didn't inspire Wes' interest in horror movies. In fact, Wes Craven had no interest in horror movies. Unlike many of his filmmaking peers, he wasn't a "monster kid" and he didn't grow up on movie culture. He barely watched movies at all until he was in his early twenties, teaching college in upstate New York.

PROFESSOR WES CRAVEN, THROUGH HIS EXTENDED *ELM STREET* METAPHOR, URGES US TO WAKE UP AND BE THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE.

THE DREAM TEAM, L-R: STAR ROBERT ENGLUND (FREDDY KRUEGER), WRITER/DIRECTOR WES CRAVEN AND CINEMATOGRAPHER JACQUES HAITKIN WEAVE A NIGHTMARE.

In the fall of 1965, Wes started teaching literature at Clarkson College in Potsdam. Around the same time, he attended several film screenings on campus, and discovered the mind-bending films of European directors like Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Luis Buñuel, and Michelangelo Antonioni. He was particularly impressed with Buñuel, whose surreal screen stories expressed the life of the subconscious mind, especially in dreams.

For years, Wes kept a dream journal, recording story fragments produced by his own subconscious mind. Now, he saw an opportunity to turn those own fragments into art. As he explained to author Brian J. Robb, "I'm interested in expanding the forms of consciousness within film because I think, with the exception of certain European directors, film is quite limited in the areas of consciousness it deals with. I think it's limiting of the art itself, because film is very dream-like."

He began experimenting with the idea in his earliest films, incorporating dream sequences into *Last House on the Left*, the script for *The Hills Have Eyes*, and *Deadly Blessing*. Then, in the summer of 1980, while directing *Swamp Thing*, he decided to build an entire film around dreams. The secret to the film's success, he theorized, would be to keep the audience guessing about which scenes were "real" and which were dreams.

It was more than a suspenseful gimmick. Wes explained in later interviews that the philosophy behind *A Nightmare on Elm Street* was derived from the teachings of Gurdjieff, a Russian mystic who said that, for most of us, everyday reality is a kind of sleep. We are slaves to our primal instincts, inherited beliefs, and ingrained habits. Our minds are on autopilot, as we thoughtlessly surrender ourselves to food, sex, and spectacle, and spend our lives distracted from distraction by distraction. It's a reality not unlike the machine-generated world of *The Matrix*. Only the bravest dare to wake up and confront true reality in all its beauty and horror.

If Freddy Krueger is the symbolic trickster that preys on us while we sleep, Nancy Thompson is the hero who wakes up. She calls herself a "survivor," but she's more than that. Professor

"I'M YOUR BOYFRIEND NOW, NANCY!" HEATHER LANGENKAMP PROVED THE PERFECT FREDDY FOIL.

IN FREDDY KRUEGER, CRAVEN CREATED A KILLER WHO DESTROYS HIS VICTIMS FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

Carol. J. Clover calls her the "grittiest of the Final Girls," a warrior who takes responsibility for her actions, and thereby takes control of her life. While her friends lose themselves in distraction, and her parents bury themselves in denial, Nancy acknowledges the ugly truth that her dreams may be real enough to kill her.

In an early draft of Wes Craven's script, Nancy seeks help from institutional sources. She talks to a minister, who responds with platitudes. She goes to a psychiatrist, who recommends hospitalization. Finally, she submits herself to a science experiment at the Institute for the Study of Sleep Disorders. There, she realizes that she – and only she – has the power to subvert her nightmares. Awake or asleep, Nancy becomes fully aware of her surroundings, and fully in control of her thoughts and actions. An ideal heroine for the Information Age (not to mention the Internet Age).

This all sounds a bit heady for Freddy, right? That's why Wes had so much trouble getting *Nightmare* made. He first mentioned the project in a December 1981 interview, saying execs at Universal Pictures were currently reviewing the script. The original monster-movie studio passed, and Wes spent the next two years fielding rejections by every major film studio in Los Angeles. Everyone said the same thing. "Too unrealistic." In a business that supposedly celebrates high concept ideas, the concept was too high. Nobody wanted an "impressionistic thriller" or an arthouse slasher.

Not yet.

Wes eventually made an alliance with producer Bob Shaye at New Line Cinema, and the rest is horror movie history. Forty years on, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is an undisputed masterpiece of American cinema, and there are many obvious reasons for the film's success. Ambitious concept. Bold execution. Spectacular imagery. Fantastic special effects. Talented cast. Riveting pacing. A few years ago, I saw the film again on the big screen at The Egyptian Theater in Hollywood, and marveled anew at the brilliant score and sound design. No matter how many times I see the film, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* works its magic on me. And I know I'm not alone.

Wes Craven understood that most audiences would not be aware of the philosophical underpinnings of his watershed film. He acknowledged that most people would experience it as a simple rollercoaster ride. But he hoped the film would resonate for some viewers on a deeper level, reminding us that "the world is what you imagine it to be." The director's films were never didactic, but the best ones express a multi-layered worldview. Reality, in a Wes Craven movie, is elastic; it can be altered through the powers of imagination and belief. If you don't believe the same thing is equally true in everyday life, just read the news.

Stories – and our belief in them – transform our world all the time.

It is equally true that mindless distraction and willful denial rob us of agency.

Fear kills.

Professor Wes Craven, through his extended Elm Street metaphor, urges us to wake up and be the change we want to see.

In his final interview for FANGORIA #337 (November 2014), he said, "I believe that what it takes to make a great horror film is to take the medium seriously and aspire to go beyond just scaring or titillating people, and do something that really makes your brain work and that will hold up for a long time. Those of us who are horror fans can feel proud that we love the genre, because it does things that have significance." That is the timeless appeal and perhaps the best legacy of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. We could use more horror films like it.

Oh, and by the way, Wes Craven's tombstone doesn't say anything about being the father of Freddy Krueger – but it does make a promise:

"I'll be right back." 💀

FACE OFF! ENGLUND AND SPECIAL MAKEUP EFFECTS ARTIST DAVID B. MILLER TRADE TOOLS.

BY KALYN CORRIGAN

FEATS OF CLAY

PART TWO

SCULPTING IS A CRUCIAL SKILL BEHIND SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE CREATURE FX, BUT IT'S OFTEN OVERLOOKED. NOT ANYMORE.

In our last issue, we heard from the sculptors who crafted some of our favorite creatures in movies like *Ghostbusters*, *Creepshow*, *The Blob* and *Army of Darkness*. In this issue, we're honored to continue Kalyn's celebration of sculptors and their favorite creations.

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 (2017)

Drax Tattoo Prosthetics, Ken Calhoun

We'd inherited all the molds from David White's company from the first *Guardians*. They were silicone prosthetics and Brian Sipe wanted them to become ProsAide transfers. It looks like one big sculpture, because it has to feel like one big sculpture, but it's actually, I think, over twenty pieces that were separate, that would puzzle piece together onto [Dave Bautista]. It could take a week for one set of Drax prosthetics, and they're very delicate. Because they're made of glue, they're really sticky, so if you accidentally put your hand on one and lift it up, it's destroyed. So, that character alone required one person just to oversee the making of all the prosthetics. I owe a lot to that character, because Drax gave me a lot of confidence in myself that I didn't realize that I had. Sipe saw potential in me, and the higher-ups at Legacy saw potential in me. That was when the tide started to change for me.

Men in Black (1997)

Edgar Stretch Head, Ryan Peterson

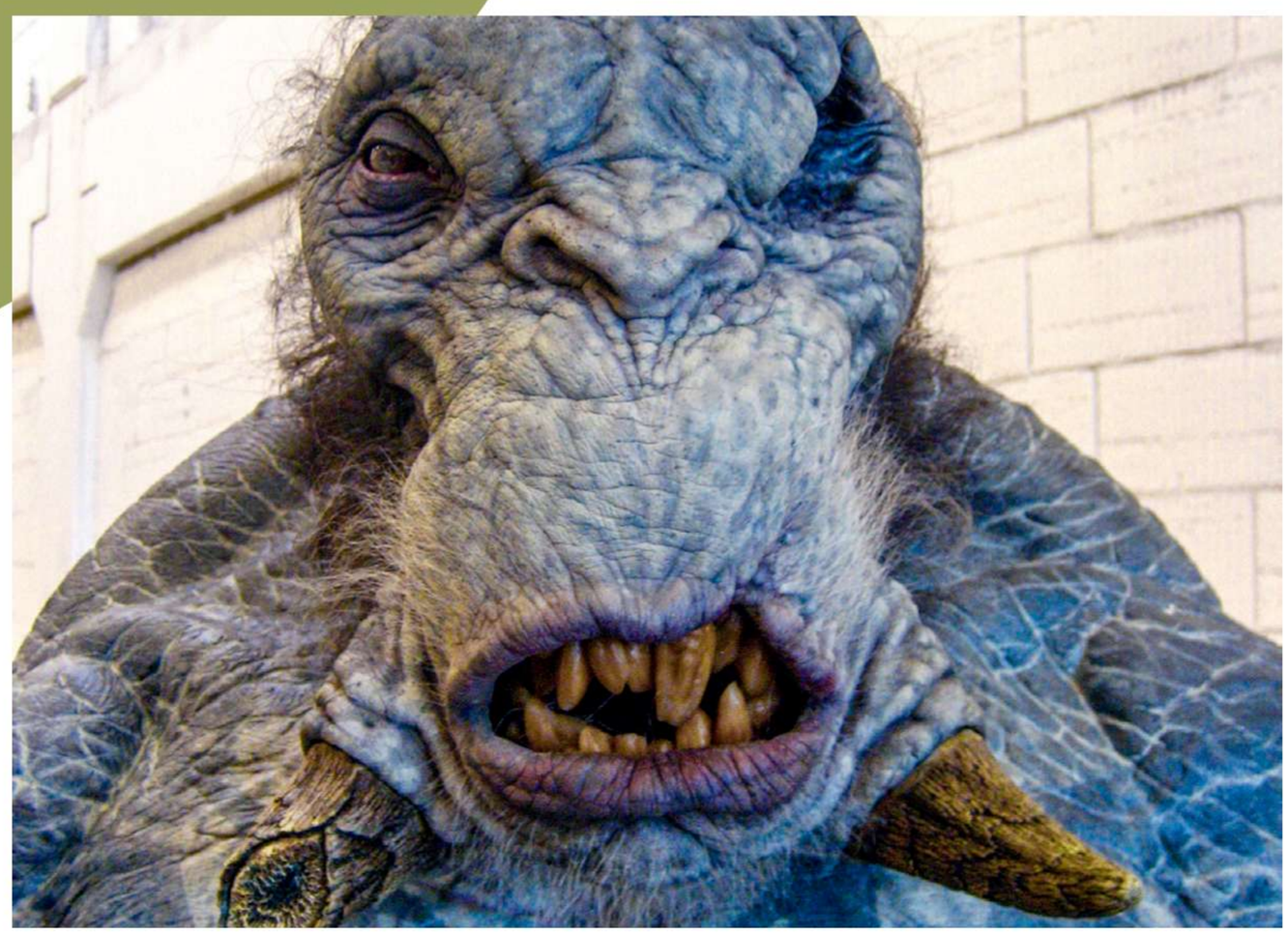
A character gets killed, his innards are sucked out and his skin is then worn as a disguise by the alien antagonist. How do you interpret that? I did so literally. It just didn't need flourishing or stylization because the concept was strong enough. I just needed to sculpt human skin being stretched back over a non-human form and because the non-human form was an alien, and not a traditional human skull understructure, I had some, albeit small, leeway with the design. It was an odd concept, which fits in well with my 'fleshy and bizarre' design sensibility. Plus, *Men in Black* was the first movie I worked on for my idol, Rick Baker. It was a dream come true. In addition, I was young, hungry and enthusiastic. Life shines on you with that combination.

PHOTOS: GOTG2 COURTESY KEN CALHOUN, MEN IN BLACK COURTESY RYAN PETERSON

V/H/S/94 (2021)

Raatma, Patrick Magee

I sculpted this piece during COVID lockdown in about four days. We had a turnaround of about fifteen days to go from concept to sculpture to creature suit, complete with a functioning jaw, hair and tubes rigged to drip black goo. I sculpted the creature suit on a fiberglass mannequin using WED clay. Overall, the creature has a smooth, human-like texture, so there was a lot of brushing it out with water, to smooth out harsh tool marks. Final texture was done using texture stamps, primarily made from orange peel textures. Once the suit was complete, and paint was dry, we fit the suit on a shop crew member and did a zoom with the on-set effects team showing them how to get the talent dressed, reviewed the prosthetic elements and gag effects, packed it up and shipped it from Los Angeles to Toronto.



Hellboy II: The Golden Army (2008)

Mr. Wink, Mario Torres

With myself art directing, I had other artists start sculpting the body while I sculpted the head. I would then put the head on the body and start making tweaks to the whole thing to push it in the right direction. I think the thing that stands out the most about this character is that he felt so alive, and that people responded so well, with Mr. Wink being one of their favorite creature characters in a film. That made me feel really proud of the contribution. I'm just happy Guillermo [del Toro] and Mike Elizalde at Spectral Motion were happy with my art direction and happy with the hard work that went into this character. We did it for the fans of the genre.

A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)

Freddy Krueger, Andrew Clement

Overall the piece was sculpted in less than a week, but the time was stretched over a longer period due to the creative discussions over the look. I did work with Constantine Sekeris on the concept for this, and I painted all of the appliances, and applied the makeup everyday along with Bart Mixon. It was nice to put a spin on such an iconic horror character, but stressful as well, because there is such a devoted fan base, which I am a part of. Most of my work tends to be original or historical characters, or age or weight makeups.

PHOTOS: V/H/S/94 (LEFT) BY MINDY PEDRICK (RIGHT) BY DERRICK CHILDERS, HELLBOY II COURTESY MARIO TORRES, ANOES (2010) BY LESLEY BECERRA

PSYCHO GOREMAN (2020)

Pandora, Graham Chivers

I spent about a week sculpting Pandora in Monster Clay. Steve Kostanski did a rough clay sketch to show what he was looking for, and I took it from there. Pandora was a lot of fun to work on, adding lots of mechanical looking bits and pieces to give that robotic look, but still keeping her feminine facial features. If you look closely, you can see that I used Angelina Jolie's lips for reference. Of course, when her helmet is removed, we see what she truly looks like. Her eyelids have been torn away, and her face is covered with nasty cuts and scars. Working with Steve is always great fun.

HIGHTOWN (2020)

Daisy Corpse, John Caglione

We took a silicone impression of [Jona Xiao], we did a Body Double mold on her head, and then we poured the Monster Clay right into that mold. Then, we popped out the Monster Clay positive, and then I just started sculpting. We did it right on location in the trailer. I love doing prosthetics, but I love doing beauty makeup, too. I'm like an odd blend. So, it was really the best situation for me. It really pushed me as a makeup artist to have the lead actor come in, do her lashes and eyeliner and her foundation, and then follow her to set, and then run back to the trailer and start sculpting these decomposed bodies in clay. It was just a great challenge, and I loved being able to sculpt in the trailer and run the department at the same time.

TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE MOVIE (1990)

Gargoyle, Robert Kurtzman

It took less than a week due to being under pressure to finish in time per the production schedule. I used guitar string rakes, typical sculpting tools for detailing, brushes for smoothing. I used WED Clay. I truly loved this because this was one of the first full body monster suits that we, KNB EFX Group, made with a mechanical head.

PHOTOS: PSYCHO GOREMAN COURTESY GRAHAM CHIVERS, HIGHTOWN COURTESY JOHN CAGLIONE, TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE COURTESY ROBERT KURTZMAN, HIGHTOWN COURTESY NICHOLAS RHINEHARD, CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON COURTESY DAVE GRASSO, MK BY TOM WOODRUFF JR.

Sweet Home (2020)

Muscle Monster, Nicholas Rinehard

This muscle suit project was overseen also by Wayne Anderson, who really took lead and made sure every part was done properly. Without him it would not have been executed as well as it was. We have multiple different tools we use, some handmade and some store-bought. We even made tools out of everyday items like spatulas. Wayne and I built a polyfoam mass to add to his back to try and take out some of the weight of the clay. We used WED, and I believe we used over twenty full boxes of clay by the end of the project. Tim Huizing had to continue to monitor the piece and make sure it didn't collapse under the weight. I am proud of being involved in this piece especially because of the scale and the quality of it. Many people were involved with the final look for the show. Additionally in the sculpting department, Brian Wade and Paul Komoda also contributed and deserve credit for creating the hands for the muscle monster.

Creature from the Black Lagoon (2007)

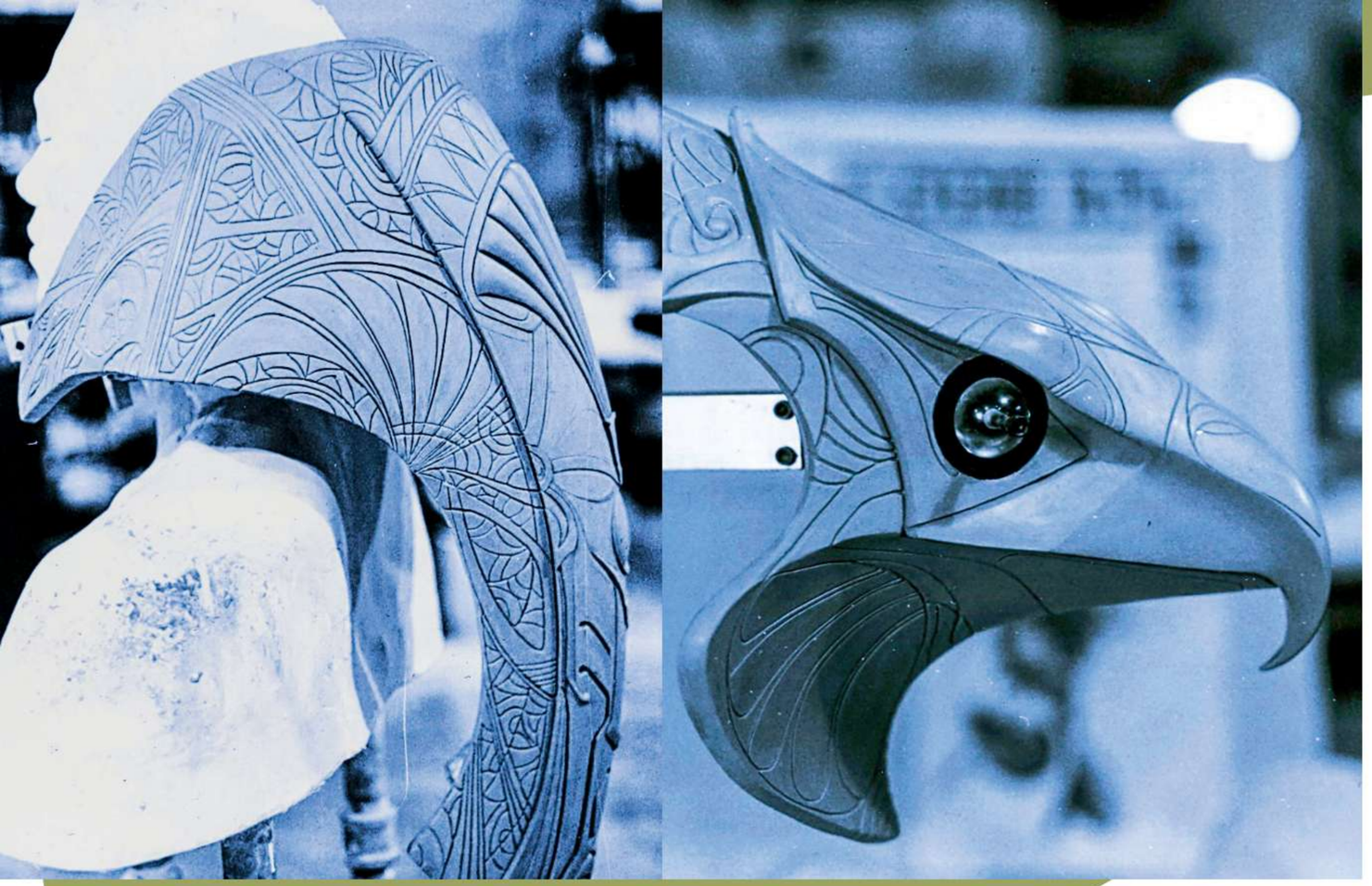
Creature Maquette for unreleased Breck Eisner remake, Dave Grasso

My dad used to buy me these Aurora Monster Model kits that were popular back in the early '70s, including *Creature from the Back Lagoon*. When I finally saw the movie, it was way better than I could have imagined. After that, I was pretty much obsessed with it. My sculpture was designed by Mark 'Crash' McCreery, who is a famous designer from Stan Winston that I've worked with for years. The clay that I used was Chavant NSP medium, and it's basically a non-sulfur-based clay. At the time, at Spectral, we were using that for everything. So, you know, for obvious reasons, I've always been a fan, and then to do a design maquette for the remake was a dream. So yeah, it was awesome.

Mortal Kombat (1995)

Head of Goro, Alec Gillis

It became clear that despite our efforts, Goro was not the darling of the producers, who were far more excited by the CGI character of Reptile in all its 8-bit glory. Along with Tom Woodruff, Jr., I was the co-designer of the character, art directing about thirty artists and technicians in my studio. I also directed the puppeteer crew on set. Tom was the in-suit performer. The sculpture took about two weeks. My first iteration was deemed too aged-looking, so I asked sculptor Andy Schoneberg to do a youthening pass on it and that's what's in the film. To this day, Goro remains one of the most sophisticated animatronics ever built for film. We only had three months to execute, and in that time built two fully articulated telemetry suit versions and one stunt suit version. By the end of the shoot, I felt like I had battled to the death with Goro.



STARGATE (1994)

Anubis and Horus Helmets, Jim Kagel

Each section of the helmet took 3-4 weeks to do, sculpted out of the old Roma Sulphur oil clay and using steel sculpting tools and metal splines. The concept drawings were given to me as a guide. They were very simplistic and 2D and generally vague. I used my imagination and design ability to flesh out the design and bring it into the 3D world. These sculptures stand out to me as the pieces that came out very true to the original sculpture, as well as coming off looking excellent in the film.

HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY (2008)

Angel of Death, Norman Cabrera

I took 3 weeks to design and sculpt a 1/6 scale design maquette from Guillermo del Toro's notes. Once approved, we moved on to sculpting the suit on Doug Jones' body cast. It was at least a couple months to sculpt the suit and all its parts, and maybe four months to construct altogether. My tools are mostly from Carter Sexton in North Hollywood, which are made by Sculpture House. I loved having the freedom to create something unique and original. Collaborating and getting design notes from del Toro was a dream job. Would love to work on a spinoff *Hellboy* movie featuring the Angel of Death.

FROM DUSK TILL DAWN (1996)

Santánico Pandemonium, Bill Hunt

We were working 40-hour weeks, and I asked Howard [Berger] if I could work all 40 hours straight through and take the rest of the week off. We had a headcast ready for the Santánico sculpture, and the final stage makeup sculpted by Evan Campbell for reference. I poured a clay-press from an old mold, and built a basic pipe armature for the mouth-snake. Then I came in mid-morning on a Saturday and got to work. Everyone else had left the shop by afternoon, so I put on the coffee and the music and alternated between the three sculptures for just over forty hours, putting the last touches on the Santánico makeup as everyone turned up for work on Monday morning. Yeah, I did it and am still proud of all three pieces. Afterward, I knew better than to ever do it again if I didn't have to. Unfortunately, at that pace, there was not much time for photo taking, and I think they were probably all in molds before I woke up again.

PHOTOS: STARGATE COURTESY JIM KAGEL, HELLBOY II COURTESY NORMAN CABRERA, FROM DUSK TILL DAWN COURTESY BILL HUNT, HELLRAISER COURTESY ALEXI BUSTAMANTE, THE PREDATOR COURTESY WAYNE ANDERSON

Hellraiser (2022)

Asphyx, Alexi Bustamante

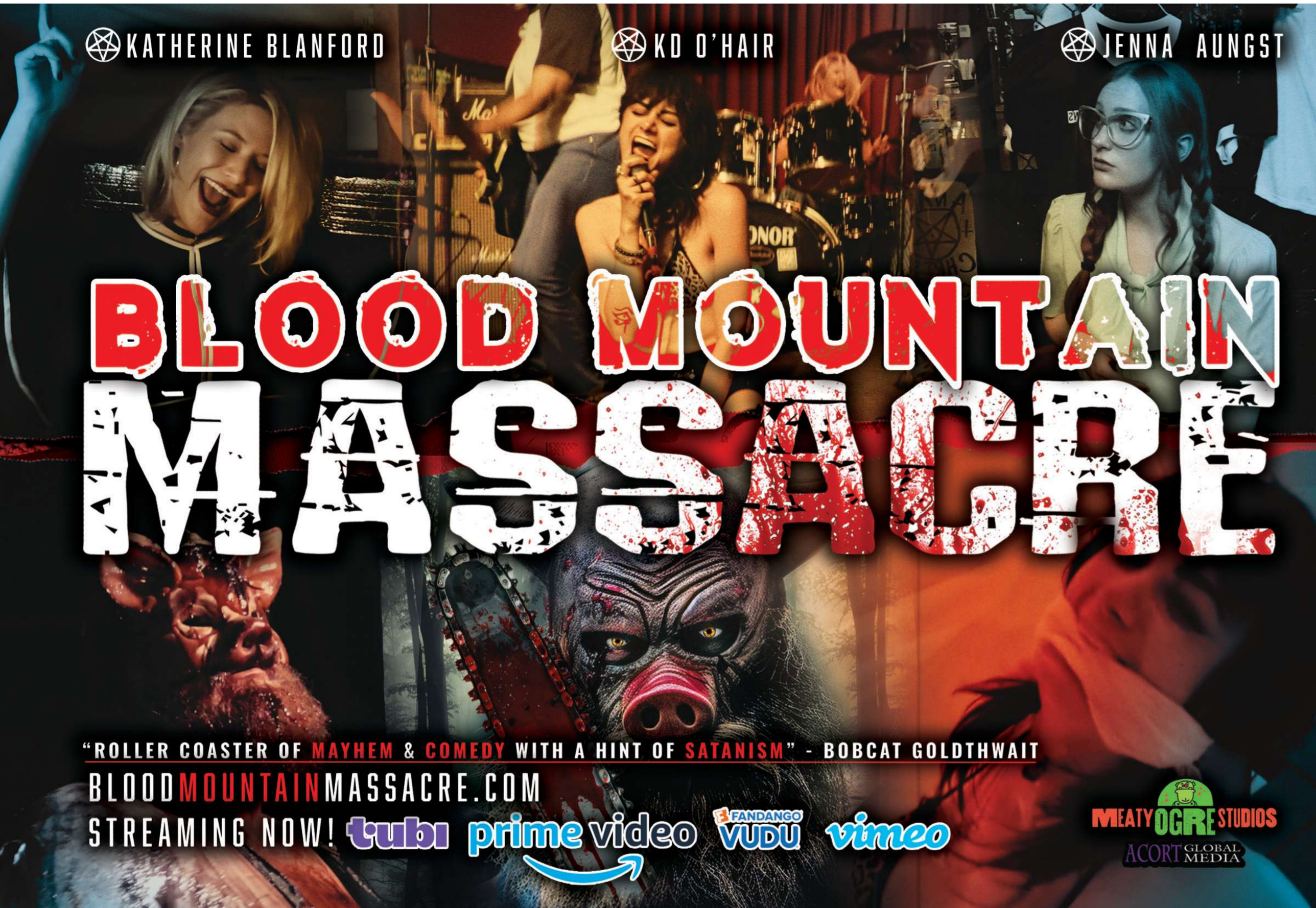
The character's face is not revealed till towards the end of the movie, since the face is covered by a flap of skin that is stretched out from its back. Hence the name, Asphyx, since it's being choked out the entire time. The sculpture took about a week to sculpt. It was sculpted on a casting of a female human skull in Chavant clay. After the sculpture was done it was handed over to the mold makers, then I moved on to work on parts of the Chatterer suit, hands and feet. Overall, working on the 2022 *Hellraiser* movie was a great and fun experience for me. I had a blast!

The Predator (2018)

Predator, Wayne Anderson

I would say timewise, it was probably about four weeks to sculpt. The Predator was sculpted in green NSP medium which is an oil-based clay and doesn't dry out, so when delays do come up you can store it without worrying about it drying out like if it was WED clay. There's no doubt the original Predator is a staple creature and goes down as being one of the best creature suits ever made. I was born in 1985 – *Predator* came out in 1987, and this would be the thirty-year anniversary movie. Being asked to sculpt the Predator was definitely a benchmark of my career.

These quotes have been edited for length and clarity.



the STRANGE and DARLING KYLE GALLNER

BY BJ COLANGELO

The star of JT Mollner's twisted thriller opens up about becoming horror's go-to guy.

PHOTO BY ALLYSON RIGGS COURTESY MIRAMAX

In the opening of *Strange Darling*, a blonde woman known only as "The Lady" runs into frame with blood spewing down the side of her face. As the camera focuses on her petrified expression, the film cuts to a high-speed chase. She's being pursued by a man with amber-tinted sunglasses sucking down a cigarette like it's the last thing he'll ever taste. He's named "The Demon," and he's played by horror's favorite charming dirtbag: Kyle Gallner.

KYLE GALLNER KICKED OFF HIS HORROR CAREER WITH 2009'S *THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT* AND HAS STEADILY RAMPED UP THE SCARE FARE EVER SINCE.

(TOP) COURTESY PARAMOUNT PICTURES & SPYGLASS MEDIA (BOTTOM) COURTESY LIONSGATE

Over the past few years, Gallner has had an undeniable run in independent horror releases like *The Cleansing Hour*, *Mother May I?*, and *The Passenger*, in addition to studio-produced genre hits like *Scream* (2022) and *Smile*. His distinctive screen presence has become synonymous with deeply flawed, psychologically complicated characters, with a streak of raw vulnerability that thrusts audiences into thinking, "I can fix him." But Gallner isn't the flavor of the week; he's a staple on every horror fan's menu, and has been for years.

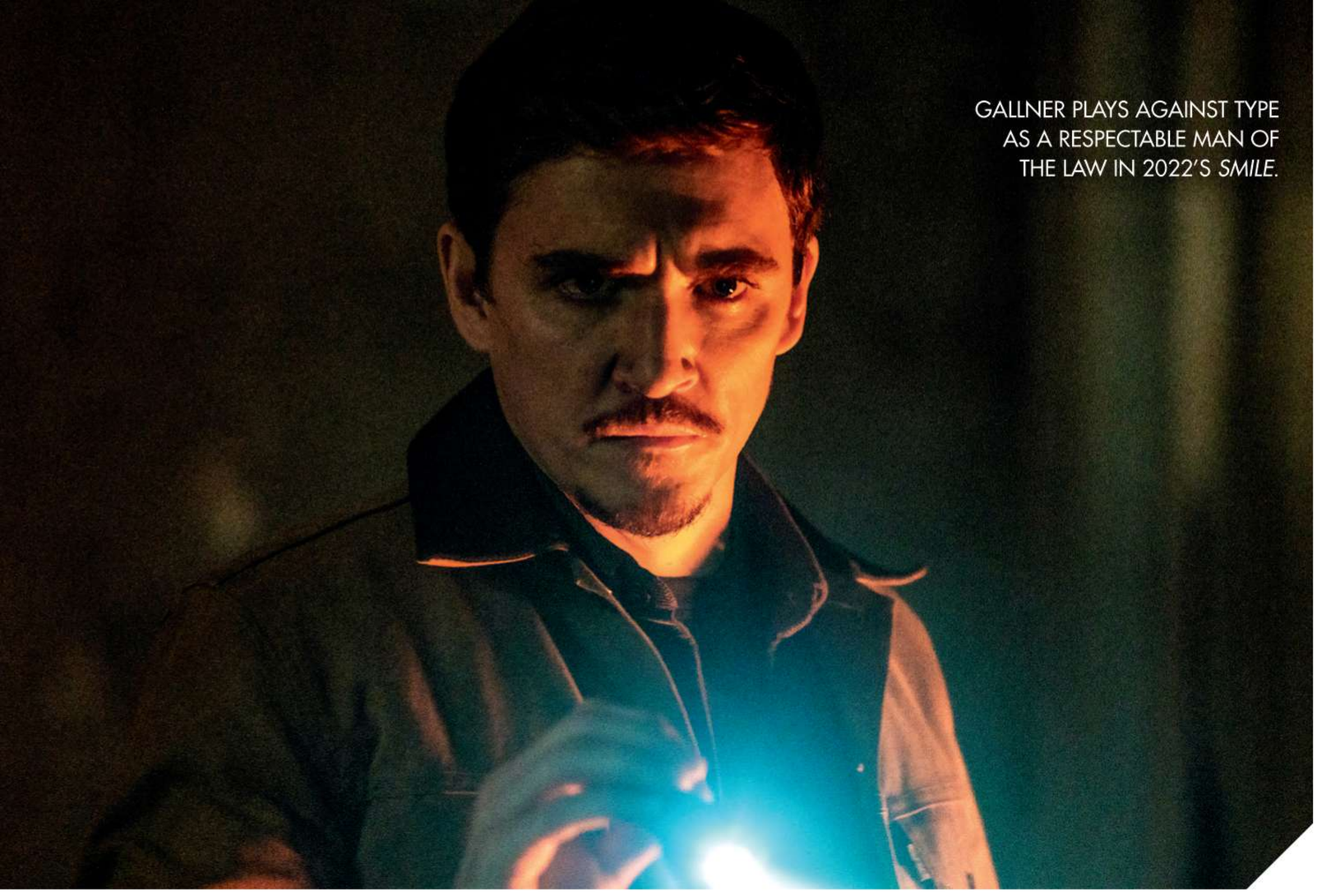
After his breakthrough role on the teen noir TV series *Veronica Mars*, Gallner became a prolific face in horror throughout his teen years. "I never set out to make horror movies," he says. "But the only place you could cut your teeth as a younger actor was in the horror space." Small parts like "Headphone Kid's Brother" in *Red Eye* led him to a starring role in *The Haunting in Connecticut*. He scored cult fame as the ultimate emo boyfriend in *Jennifer's Body*, found himself tortured in Kevin Smith's *Red State*, and was hailed as one of the few redeeming qualities of the 2010 remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, a film people still feel the need to pester him about nearly fifteen years later.

"There's always that risk of something like that just being doomed from the start, and you can't take it personally," Gallner says. "Some of the stuff that people were saying about me [...] it just cracked me up because [...] they were playing the game of 'meanest and craziest comment.'"

Gallner remains unbothered by the haters and the legions of new podcasts that pop up each year to roast the *Elm Street* remake, because "at the end of the day, it's a movie, man." He says this with a sincere smile and without a lick of sarcasm. As intimidating and sometimes terrifying as the characters he's played are, Gallner, the man, radiates warmth and kindness.

Before he let his now memorable mustache grow in, he was playing emotionally distraught teenagers well into adulthood thanks to his genetic

SCREAM KING: DO NOT BE FOOLED BY THIS MAN'S JAKE RYAN MOMENT.



GALLNER PLAYS AGAINST TYPE AS A RESPECTABLE MAN OF THE LAW IN 2022'S *SMILE*.

babyface. It wasn't until working on *The Passenger* – a thrilling character study where he plays a gun-wielding madman named Benson who holds his fast food co-worker Randy hostage on a road trip to hell – that it finally hit him that his career had evolved. He recalls telling his costar Johnny Berchtold that, had the movie been made five years prior, he'd have been cast as Randy. He even jokes that playing a cop in *Smile* was what finally hammered it home that he was being cast as an adult. "You hit a point where it is a little odd, where the person you are doesn't line up with the same sort of angst and feelings that you're playing anymore," he says. "I would be playing these younger roles and sort of dying inside a little bit because I am just not anywhere near there anymore." Thankfully, Gallner has finally been given the space to play more complex, mature roles – and horror fans have taken notice.

Ironically, it was the role of a punk pyromaniac named Simon in Adam Rehmeier's indie hit *Dinner in America* that changed the course of Gallner's career, despite not being a horror movie. "That role really opened up a lot of doors," he says. "It was a movie where Adam trusted me to do something that no one's ever allowed me to do." Simon is an aggressive, gnarly character, and before him, Gallner says he was "the guy whose parents got killed on *Law & Order*, and I'm crying in the hospital bed or whatever the fuck it was." The film initially struggled to find distribution, but everyone who had seen it loved it and couldn't stop talking about it. A mystique emerged around the film and Gallner's dynamic performance.

Horror fans were already on board with Gallner thanks to decades of goodwill, but *Dinner in America* proved that he could carry a movie as a leading man. "It really helped sort of start the path that I'm on now," he says. "It helped people see me in a different light." The films that followed look like the twisted cousins of *Dinner In America*, with *Mother May I?*, *The Passenger*, and now *Strange Darling* all featuring Gallner in an intimate setting rich with layered storytelling, painfully difficult circumstances, and acting opposite a co-star that brings out the best of his talents. He calls his *Dinner in America* co-star Emily Skeggs "the greatest scene partner in the world," but also can't stop gushing about his other "killer" co-stars: Berchtold in *The Passenger*, Sosie Bacon in *Smile*, Holland Roden in *Mother, May I?*, and Willa Fitzgerald in *Strange Darling*. This pattern of sharply written two-handers emerged in the wake of *Dinner in America*, but it's one Gallner is more than happy to continue, because he's "always been an indie kid at heart."

This new era of his career has brought an entirely new world of fans, ones that associate Gallner with edgier roles – which allows a film like *Strange Darling* to set the perfect trap. "I do think there's a certain group that will definitely, automatically [think] of me as one thing, and I do think you can weaponize that," he says. "You can create an expectation, and then you can flip it around on the audience." *Strange Darling* is an exercise in the perversion of assumptions, and a cursory glance at any comment section beneath the trailer proves that plenty are buying into the "Cult of Gallner" they've concocted in their minds based solely on the last five years of his career. People love him, and the recognition is long overdue.

"You want people to watch and enjoy the things that you do and love these movies and love these characters, or even fucking hate these characters if that's the point, but you want them to take the movie the way they're supposed to," he says. "But it's a lot of work to get something made; to get something seen is even harder."

Luckily, Gallner has reached the caliber of horror darling where audiences will show up solely because he's in it, whether it's the first kill in a slasher revival or the leading role in one of the best indie horror films of the year.

It's easy in hindsight to look back with fondness, but we're lucky. We're witnessing in real time the career run of an actor that horror history will remember as one of the best to ever do it. 💀

CREDITED SIMPLY AS THE DEMON, THIS DARLING IS STRANGE, ALL RIGHT.

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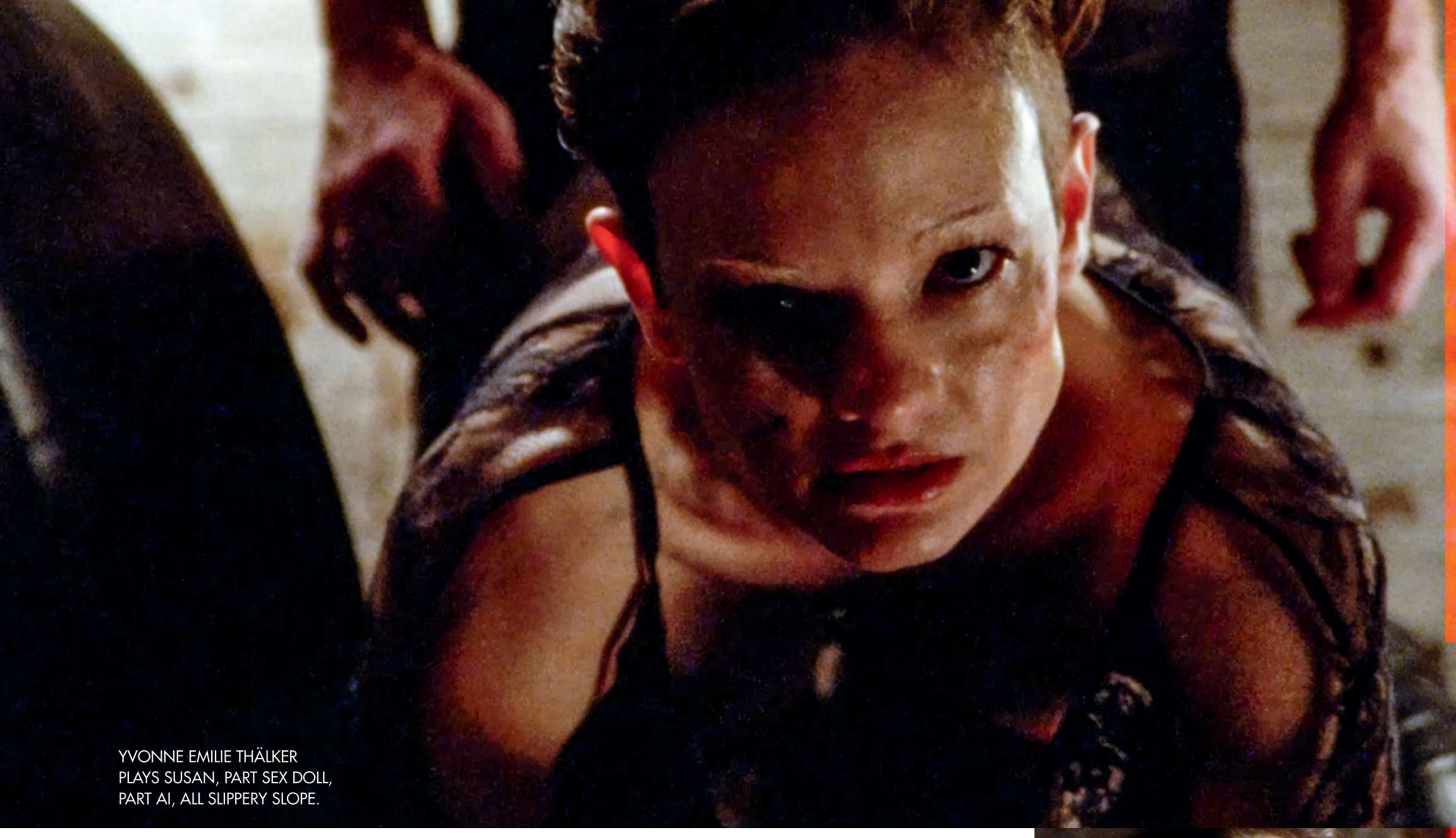
BLACK SUSAN GETS DARK

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

In the corner of a small Brooklyn studio space, with a couple of black couches and white paint peeling off the brickwork, a seemingly unpleasant encounter is taking place. Under low lighting, actor Damian Maffei places his hand on the throat of his seated co-star Yvonne Emilie Thälker, who's wearing a sheer slip that leaves little to the imagination. As "Action" is called, Maffei feigns tightening his grip.



YVONNE EMILIE THÄLKER PLAYS SUSAN, PART SEX DOLL, PART AI, ALL SLIPPERY SLOPE.

"OK, you win," Thälker says. "This time." He lets go, saying, "I thought you'd be tougher than that." She replies, "I'm as tough as you want me to be, Derek."

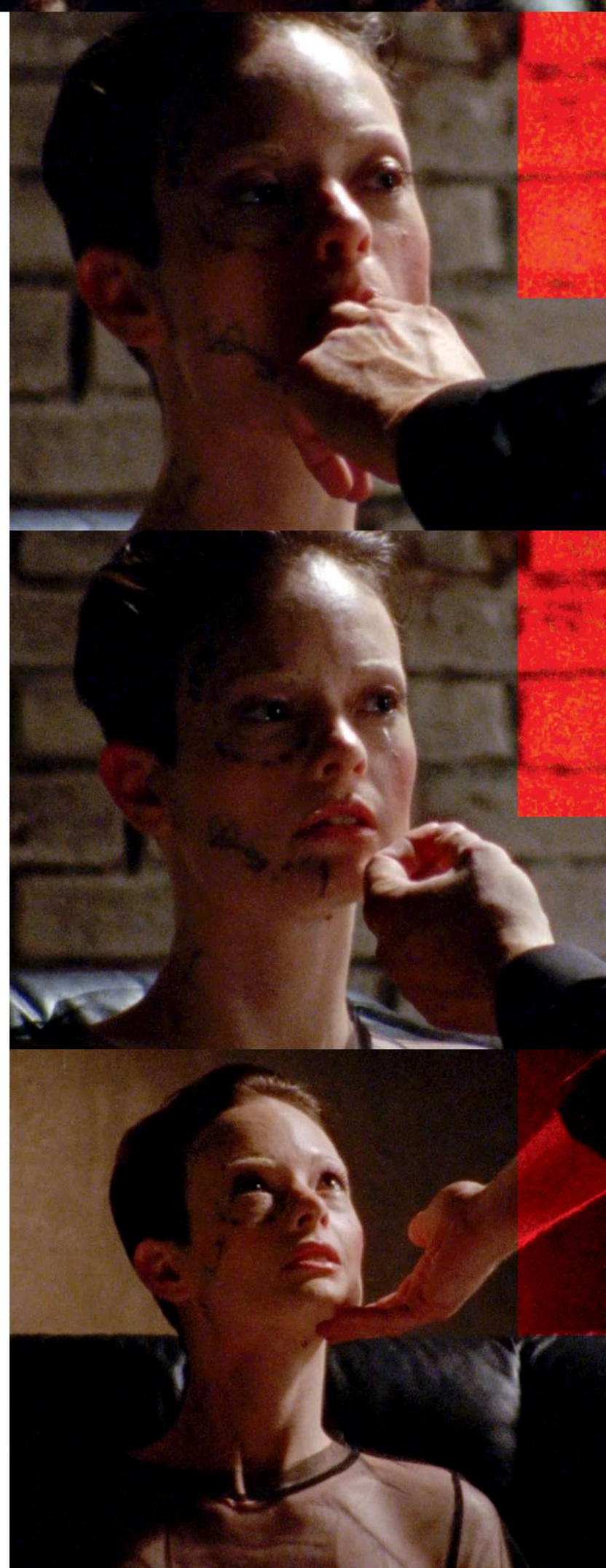
A brighter light goes on, and actor Marc Romeo enters the scene, checking Thälker's head and neck. "How do you feel?" he asks Maffei, and after a pause he responds, "It's a little bit awkward."

If writer/director Scooter McCrae has his way, audiences will have the same reaction to *Black Eyed Susan*, his first feature in more than two decades. The creator of *Shatter Dead* and *Sixteen Tongues*, which took unusual and uncompromising approaches to the zombie and cyberpunk genres in the '90s, is now imagining a very near future in which AI technology allows people – specifically men – to unleash their darkest urges on synthetic humans. Thälker plays Susan, a literal living doll programmed to take – and encourage – physical abuse. Maffei's Derek is hired by Gil (Romeo), his friend and Susan's creator, to give Susan a test run of sorts, which leads them into unexpected and unsettling psychosexual realms.

"The movie covers a lot of bases," McCrae says. "There's toxic masculinity and issues of abuse and consent. Then it goes off into some other areas that are related in terms of taboo subject matter that normally doesn't get covered in movies because that stuff makes people uncomfortable. I, of course, am pretty comfortable with everything. I just think about following a line of action. So if you start with BDSM, where do you go from there?"

Black Eyed Susan began as the "B" story of a previous McCrae script called *Narrowcaster* before becoming its own project. He originally intended to finance the film himself, shooting it on video on weekends, before being introduced to producer Justin Martell of Not the Funeral Home by a mutual friend, legendary Italian composer Fabio Frizzi (who wound up scoring *Black Eyed Susan*). "I've always been a big fan of Scooter's other films," says Martell, who's joined on the producing team by Maureen McCrae, Seager Dixon, and Aimee Kuge. "I think he's highly underrated as a completely independent director – a total outlaw filmmaker. When I first read *Black Eyed Susan*, it was one of the rare scripts I actually sat and read in one sitting, and I wanted to make it right away."

Thus it became one of a series of genre features (beginning with Austin Jennings's *Eight Eyes*) co-produced by Vinegar Syndrome and Not the Funeral Home and shot on 16mm. Then it came time to cast the challenging project, and for Derek, Martell reached out to Maffei, whose long list of genre credits



PHOTOS COURTESY NOT THE FUNERAL HOME & VINEGAR SYNDROME

includes *The Strangers: Prey at Night*, *Haunt*, and last year's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* video game. Maffei recalls:

"When Justin first contacted me, he said, 'We're doing this movie, I think you'd be great for it. Scooter McCrae is writing and directing, Vinegar Syndrome is involved, Fabio Frizzi is doing the score, we're shooting on film,' and I was like, 'Is this a prank? Let's go do this right now!' Then he said, 'Just to be completely transparent, it's complete nudity, beating a sex doll, there's a razor-blade blow job,' and I was like, 'You've got the wrong guy here.' So I told him, 'Man, that sounds amazing, but my schedule's not going to work out.' So he said, 'Well, what if we push the schedule?' and I said, 'Fuck, all right, send me the script.' I read it and thought, 'Shit, I *have* to do this!' I did something there that I'd never done previously, which was I read the script, then I read it again right away. It was complex, it was scary, and I was scaring myself, considering doing it, but I just dove right in."

Thälker, on the other hand, is making their acting debut on *Black Eyed Susan* after more than ten years of modeling work. Following one such gig with McCrae, he offered them the Susan role, and they were immediately intrigued. "Susan is designed essentially for one purpose, and that is to take a beating," Thälker explains. "She's kind of like one of those sex dolls, but since she has artificial intelligence, she can respond, she can react, she can taunt, she can be a brat. But she's designed to be taken advantage of in that context."

"For me," Martell says, "it's a very interesting look at, and potential warning about, a dangerous curve that may be ahead, as people continue to disassociate from each other and gravitate toward interactions with their devices, and AI as it becomes more and more advanced."

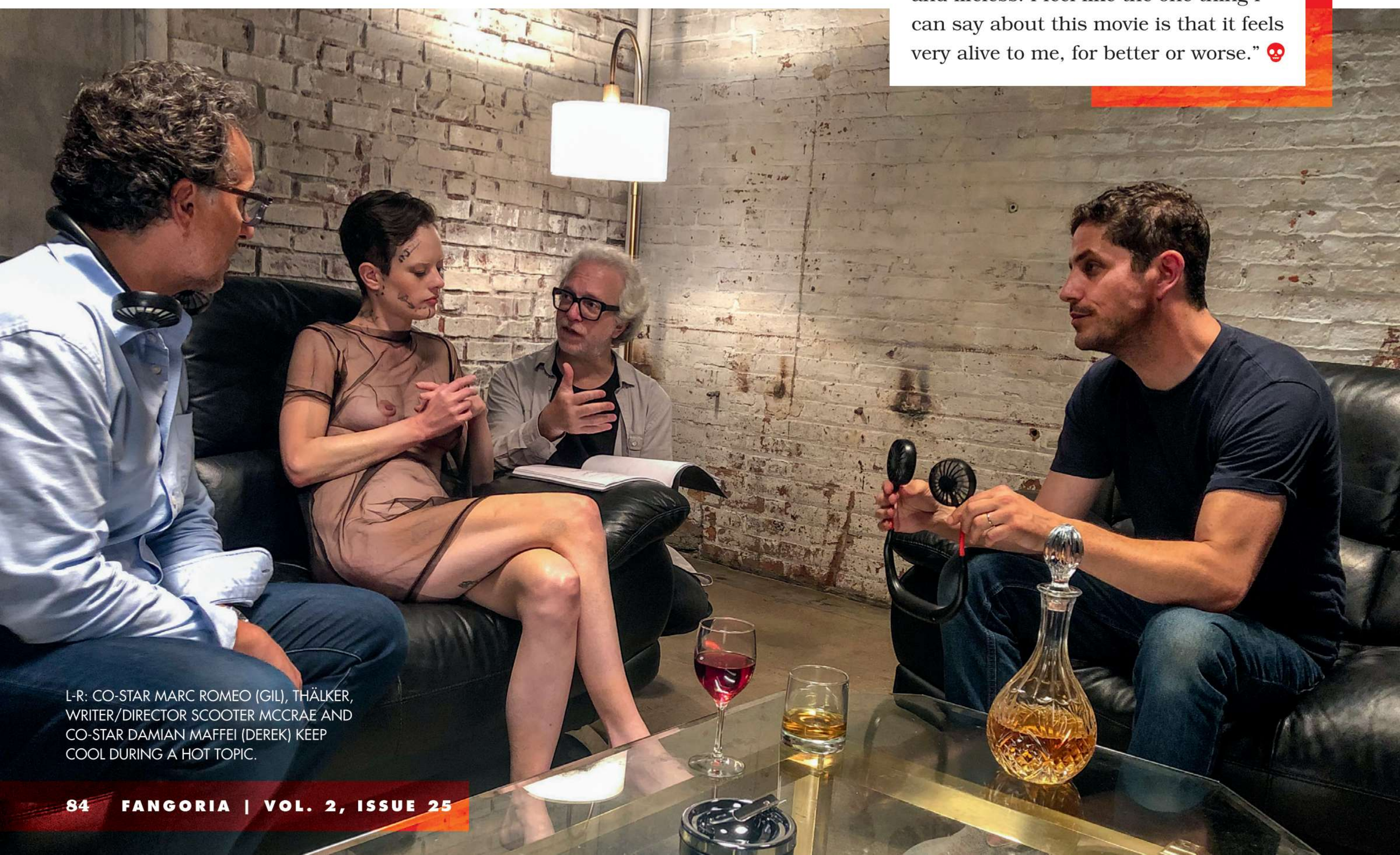
"It brings up a lot of moral issues around dealing with AI and how you treat it," Thälker adds. "Is it ethical to do this, and does that reflect on how you treat a real person? So it definitely does speak to this moment."

One character who has no issues with exploiting the possibilities of AI is Gil, whose friendly demeanor and apparent good intentions mask an underlying corporate ruthlessness. "Gil thinks he's going to save the world," Romeo says. "He really believes in this idea that he's going to allow abusive people to take their angst and sickness out on dolls as opposed to other people. But he is also an entrepreneur and thinks he can make zillions of dollars off it too."

Pro wrestler turned actor Scott Fowler discusses his brief, but crucial role:

"I had many conversations with my wife about whether I wanted to be involved in what was sure to be a controversial production. I knew it would be edgy, to say the least, and I felt it could potentially do more harm than good for my acting career. However, there's a quote from a book on the wrestling business that I love and find to be the absolute truth: 'Controversy creates cash.' With that in mind, I was willing to take the risk and dove in headfirst, and I'm glad I did."

As cautionary tale and no-holds-barred genre exercise, *Black Eyed Susan* has already spurred conversation from its festival play, and will no doubt continue to do so when Vinegar Syndrome releases it this fall. For McCrae, the crucial quality is bringing his own personal point of view to the troubling material. "I feel like so often, people choose a subject matter and don't bring their own fears, their own desires, their own interests into it," McCrae says. "And if you don't do that, you end up with something cold and lifeless. I feel like the one thing I can say about this movie is that it feels very alive to me, for better or worse."



L-R: CO-STAR MARC ROMEO (GIL), THÄLKER, WRITER/DIRECTOR SCOOTER MCCRAE AND CO-STAR DAMIAN MAFFEI (DEREK) KEEP COOL DURING A HOT TOPIC.

THE LONELY MAN AND HIS LOW-BUDGET GHOST STORY

BY RYAN SCOTT

PHOTOS BY RYAN SCOTT • STILLS COURTESY THE BASEMENT PRODUCTIONS

GRAHAM SKIPPER SHOT HIS NEW MOVIE IN LESS THAN A WEEK.

It is a stormy day in Texas, or one that is supposed to be stormy, anyhow. The forecast was grim, predicting much rain and thunder. The sky still looks a bit apocalyptic, fitting for the occasion given that writer/director/star Graham Skipper's *The Lonely Man with the Ghost Machine* is a post-apocalyptic picture. Mercifully for Skipper and his rag-tag crew, the storm never comes. There is no time – or money – to waste.

"This is obviously a very low-budget affair," Skipper says knowingly, greeting me as I arrive in the evening at what is typically a disc golf course in Bastrop, just about forty minutes outside of Austin. Today, the fifty-acre property is transformed into a lonely man's home in the aftermath of the apocalypse. The crew is in the middle of grinding out a six-day shoot under the direction of Skipper.

"It's fun because it's kind of like summer camp a bit," Skipper says of the crew, several of whom he has known since college. "We're all

WRITER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, EDITOR AND STAR – THIS *LONELY MAN* (GRAHAM SKIPPER) NEEDS TO HIRE SOME DAMN COWORKERS.

staying at my house." He lives about an hour away in Buda. The property being used to bring this low-budget affair to life was found on Vrbo and, fortunately, the owner was happy to let them do what needed to be done to accommodate the film. The location also has the added benefit of being right up the road, more or less, from a major piece of horror history.

"Bastrop – that's where they filmed *Texas Chain Saw [Massacre]*! This is perfect!" Skipper says, revealing his thoughts when he found this place. His film is admittedly less grounded, involving a puppet monster and a machine cobbled together from junk that summons the ghost of his dead wife. It takes place in the aftermath of a global catastrophe, with Skipper playing the last man on Earth.

Skipper conceived of the idea years ago. "I never thought that anyone would ever give me money for it," he admits. Then an opportunity with V Channels, as Skipper puts it, "just sort of fell into my lap." They gave him total creative freedom to be as "weird" as he wanted to be. "I think you would agree that we could all use more weird horror," Skipper posits. He just had to get all of that "weird" out in a week, which is no time at all by feature film standards.

He shows me around the set, which includes a small, boarded-up "apocalypse cabin," adorned with a door purchased from Home Depot that Skipper intends to return once filming wraps. There are acres of lush greenery with few signs of civilization nearby. There is a puddle of blood made from chocolate on the ground. Some poor June bugs couldn't resist the sweet temptation of the blood puddle and float lifelessly on top. Garbage bags line the sealed windows of the cabin as they gear up to shoot a night scene. Inconveniently, the sun is still up, so they do what they must.

All of the equipment is piled onto the patio of the tiny cabin because the weather report suggests heavy rain. Better safe than sorry on a production of this size – one that can ill afford a catastrophe at the hands of Mother Nature. The crew doesn't seem bothered by any of it as they dutifully get ready to film some scenes with Skipper's character, Wozzek, in the cabin.

THEE GHOST IN THE MACHINE (CHRISTINA LIND AS NELLIE).

There is no hair and makeup department. The film's female lead, Christina Lind, stepped up to help handle her own costumes. This is down-and-dirty filmmaking for the love of the game if ever there were such a thing.

"On stuff at this budget level, you've just gotta find people who want to come out and make cool shit," Skipper says with an air of appreciation, having found precisely that. "I've been very lucky. This has been a team of people that are all just down to make something interesting and different."

This is the fourth day of the shoot, though Skipper says it feels like it's been ten. He and the bare bones crew have essentially been shooting overnight. Still, Skipper is in high spirits while being pulled in every conceivable direction. He's talking to a journalist, answering rapid-fire questions from members of his crew, and ensuring he's got his lines memorized for the next scene in addition to focusing on directing that scene. The man has his hands full, but he seems at home spinning multiple plates. It's remarkable to witness.

APOCALYPSE WOW: WOZZEK (SKIPPER) IS READY FOR THE END OF THE WORLD!

ONE NELLIE, TWO NELLIES, THREE NELLIES, FOUR. THERE'S A GHOST WIFE KNOCKING AT MY DOOR.

"We move quickly. We know when we've got it. We don't do more takes than we need," Skipper says. "The rule was, we don't have a lot of money, we don't have a lot of time, [but] we do have endless imagination. If you're between two choices, make the bolder choice."

The crew then heads into the cabin to film the scenes. The inside of the cabin features lots of survival necessities and even some set decorations they found on the side of the road, which suits the "last man on Earth" vibe. Skipper lies on the bed at the back of the cabin with the crew creatively tucking into every corner of the tiny space to get the shots. This is the first time Skipper has directed himself, which he described as "weird." His trust in director of photography Ken Whiting, with whom he's worked many times before, made things easier.

"I should have written in more sleeping scenes," Skipper quips as he gets ready to call action. He instantly snaps into character, distressed, yet hauntingly thrilled at the vision that is his dead wife. On the other side of the cabin is the so-called ghost machine that summons his wife back from the dead, which was inspired by the Resonator in *From Beyond*. After just two takes, it's on to the next shot.

They're filming at a blistering pace of roughly sixteen pages a day. They don't have the luxury of doing a Kubrickian number of takes. Skipper does have the benefit of shooting to edit. As the man putting it together in the editing room, he knows what he needs: maximum efficiency.

Unfortunately, the puppet monster, called The Deleterian (voiced by Paul Guyet), wasn't in the scenes the day I was on set. Skipper describes the creature as "more like a wolf" that "occasionally stands up on his hind legs." It's that puppet that drew Lind to the project.

"I'm really interested in puppets," Lind tells me. "I'm interested in how analog we can be." Despite not being a big horror fan, Lind was sold on the project due to the strength of the script. "There's this undercurrent in the script of revenge and also this question of what you do in a crisis – how you behave."

After wrapping the scenes with Wozzek, they move on to filming Lind's scenes as Nellie, who is bathed in green light thanks to the magic of the ghost machine. It's Lind's last day, which makes it an emotional one. Yet, there's no time for sentimentality as minutes are in short supply. The crew gets ready for the fast and furious pace of shooting once the sun goes down. Even as they dive head first into another long night, spirits remain high.

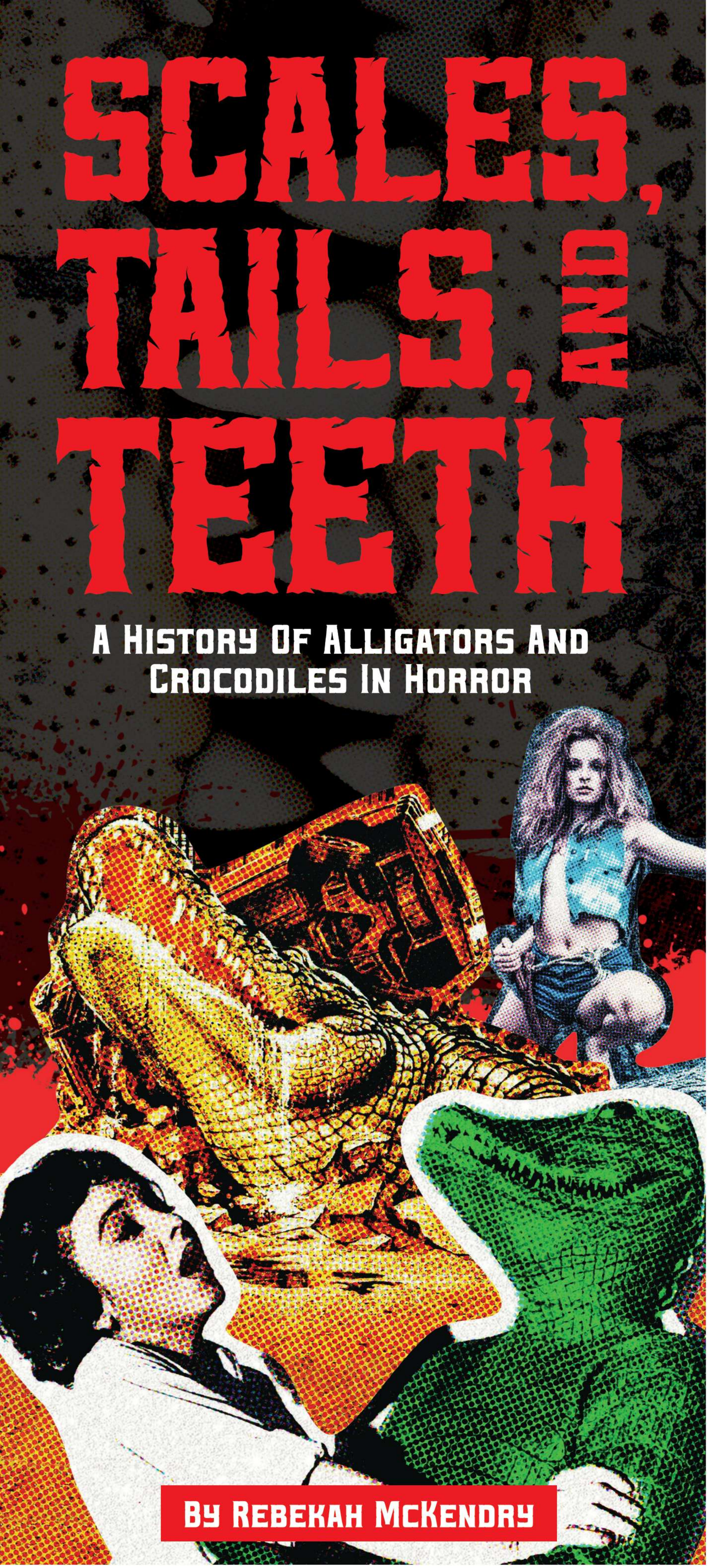
"I don't think there's anybody on this set who would rather be anywhere else right now," Skipper muses. "As challenging as sometimes it can be, it's also what we all live for."

The Lonely Man with the Ghost Machine hits streaming in September from V Channels. 💀

GRAHAM SKIPPER IS WORKING FROM BED TODAY (WITH SOUND MIXER CYRUS RODAS AND DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY KEN WHITING).

SCALES, TAILS, AND TEETH

A History Of Alligators And Crocodiles In Horror



By Rebekah McKendry

Few creatures currently walking the earth feel as prehistoric as alligators and crocodiles. Though birds are descended from dinosaurs, there is a Brontosaurus-sized disconnect between their current appearance and a fierce, fanged Cretaceous beast. But with alligators and crocodiles the degree of separation is much less extreme. They basically look like mini dinosaurs that were so perfect in their O.G. form that nature saw little need for improvement over hundreds of millions of years. Maybe that's why I love them so much.

I am captivated by them not only in real life, but also in every horror interpretation I can find. "Alligator Found Swimming in Public Pool"? I'll be the first to read the news article. New movie about a giant alligator terrorizing a resort, lake, or summer camp? Grab the popcorn, 'cause I'm going in!

My love of gator and croc movies reached a fever pitch a few summers ago when I was shooting a film in Mississippi. It was a blisteringly hot and humid day, and we had 12 hours of shooting outside close to a lake (which also meant an abundance of mosquitos). At some point during the grueling day, I leaned over to the director of photography and jokingly remarked that I was about to go dip my feet in the lake. His demeanor changed to one of dead seriousness as he issued one of the gravest warnings I've ever received: "Do *not* get your feet anywhere near that lake – *ever*! There are more gators in there than you could even imagine!"

Suddenly I was visualizing the world under the water's surface, much like I do when I look at the ocean – a world of inky black depths and a beautifully horrific monster lying in wait.

My fear/obsession with the ocean led to a lifelong love of shark films, and I was suddenly aware this applied to freshwater predators as well. I'm endlessly exhilarated by the thought of what might be lurking below the water's peaceful, serene surface. So, let's dive into the cinematic pond and join some of the most dangerous predators to crawl across our screens.

B-CREATURES AND REDNECK EXPLOITATION

One of the first major appearances of alligators in horror came in 1959 at the height of the B-movie monster craze. During a flurry of mutant-laden movies combining humans with snakes, bees, flies, and many other potentially horrifying critters, 20th Century Fox decided it was high time for man to meet gator. In *The Alligator People*, a wife (played by Beverly Garland) searches for her missing husband. Her quest leads to an isolated house in the middle of a bayou and a cast of wild characters including Lon Chaney Jr. crafting a highly exploitative, cartoonish performance that would become a staple of gator films to come – the sleazy, backwoods redneck. The young wife eventually discovers that her husband has become part alligator, and horror ensues with plenty of swamp-laden terrors and a fun alligator/man mutant hybrid.

As the '60s and '70s ushered in an onslaught of exploitation movies, the seedy hillbilly trope seen in *The Alligator People* became a common occurrence, and this is where many of our cinematic alligators find themselves for the next several years – in the background of exploitation movies with their unflattering caricatures of backwoods Cajuns and southerners. Movies like *Poor White Trash*, a.k.a. *Bayou*, *The Louisiana Hussy*, *'Gator Bait*, and *Gator* use the swamp and its toothsome residents as a framework for some over-the-top, southern-style sensationalism.

Redneck-sploitation combined with gators went big, Texas-style, in 1977 with Tobe Hooper's *Eaten Alive*, just a few years after the director changed horror history with *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. For *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, Hooper drew inspiration from real-life murderer and grave robber Ed Gein. For his cinematic follow-up, *Eaten Alive*, he once again looked to America's real-life monsters and found Joe Ball, a Texan who allegedly killed upwards of 20 women in the 1930s and fed their bodies to his pet alligators. Hooper cast Neville Brand as the sleazy, backwoods killer as well as then-unknown actor Robert Englund to play Buck, who would deliver the line "Name's Buck. I'm rarin' to fuck."

The late '70s saw several alligator and crocodile movies, mostly in response to the success of *Jaws*, but one alligator movie in particular was about to become the king of the swamp.

OUR COVER STAR ROBERT ENGLUND IN THE APTLY-TITLED *EATEN ALIVE*.

THE MOTHER OF ALL ALLIGATORS

After the release of *Jaws* in 1975, everyone was rushing to find the next larger-than-life creature that could eat local townsfolk and unwary swimmers on the big screen. Though most filmmakers stuck with variations of sharks, some turned to land-based predators including bears, bats, and an endless parade of killer insects. But one of the best post-*Jaws* films is 1980's *Alligator*. A satire from the wonderful minds of Lewis Teague and John Sayles, the movie begins with a young girl getting a baby alligator as a pet while on vacation in Florida whom she lovingly names Ramon. When the family returns to Chicago, the father flushes Ramon down the toilet. In keeping with the age-old urban legend, Ramon thrives in the Chicago sewer system for over a decade, feasting on stray cats and dogs, until he becomes big enough to seek larger prey.

Alligator follows the same basic beats and formula of *Jaws* but brings a fun and creative new flair. The movie inserts some pointed social commentary on the corrupt meat industry (who has secretly been putting growth hormones into their product which have trickled down the food chain to Ramon), economic

AND HERE WE HAVE ANOTHER APROPOS TITLE: *ALLIGATOR*.

disparity, animal testing, tabloid media, and even class differences as Ramon literally eats the rich at a fancy garden party. But in addition to the social commentary, *Alligator* features one of the scariest scenes from the 1980s – the pool.

The oversized sewer gator decides to take a break in a backyard pool during a children's party. While playing a game of "pirates," a group of kids forces a blindfolded boy to "walk the plank," a.k.a. the diving board, unknowingly sending him right into the jaws of the alligator lurking in the deep end. Having viewed this movie far too young for my own good, this scene not only gave me nightmares, but I discovered much later it is a shared *kindertrauma* for an entire generation who now can't use a diving board without thinking about the possibility of a massive alligator silently waiting below.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *PRIMEVAL*, *KILLER CROCODILE*, AND THE ONLY TITLE ON OUR LIST WITH A BIT OF IRONY TO IT: *LAKE PLACID*.

CG AND BEYOND

Gators and crocs again slithered across our screens in excess during the late '90s and 2000s. With CG technology emerging, the idea of creating a massive crocodile was not quite as daunting. 1999's *Lake Placid* is a darkly comedic comedic look at gators, but the following decade was filled with several other gems including three in 2007: *Rogue*, *Black Water* (focusing on Australian crocs), and *Primeval*, which was inspired by a supposed real-life Burundi crocodile with a death count in the hundreds. Harnessing all the power of formulaic monster films and CG, the Syfy Channel found a hot market in crocs/gators, churning out a banquet of supergators, supercrocs, and a crocosaurus. Much like sharks, gators and crocs have become a sub-genre with its own devoted viewership no matter the budget, and I, for one, will watch *Methgator* with the same level of enthusiasm as *Crawl* anytime. Yes, *Methgator*. It's a gem.

Yet even with the recent massive success of the movie *Crawl*, alligators and crocs don't garner the continuous iterations that sharks receive. We get a massive shark film every few years (I loved this year's *Under Paris*), and there is an endless supply of shark faire releasing on the indie level. But gators and crocs only emerge in trend-based surges. So, I will end my reptilian cinema love letter with a plea for filmmakers to consider more toothsome crocodilian creatures when they look for monsters. I'll also leave you with my must-see alligator and crocodile films for you to chew on.

FANGORIA'S MUST-SEE CROCODILE/ALLIGATOR MOVIES

The Great Alligator River (1979)
Eaten Alive (1976)
Alligator (1980)
Dark Age (1987)
Killer Crocodile (1989)
Lake Placid (1999)
Blood Surf (2000)
Rogue (2007)
Black Water (2007)
Primeval (2007)
The Pool (2018)
Crawl (2019)
Black Water: Abyss (2020)

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Jack Nicholson in THE SHINING
CARPENTER on Halloween 2
HORROR IN ENTERTAINMENT
MOTEL HELL
PET SEMATARY
THE SACRIFICE GAME FLIPS THE SCRIPT
FOUNDERS DAY: RETURN OF THE REGIONAL SLASHER!
THE ADAMS FAMILY KNOWS WHERE THE DEVIL ROAMS
HORROR, HAIR, AND HEART: INSIDE LARRY FESSENDEN'S
BLACK OUT
SUITABLE FLESH: BARBARA CRAMPTON'S RETURN TO LOVECRAFT
EXORCIST: BELIEVER CONVERTS THE SKEPTICS
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Salute to psycho Leatherface
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The Night of the Hunted
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the VIDEO EYE

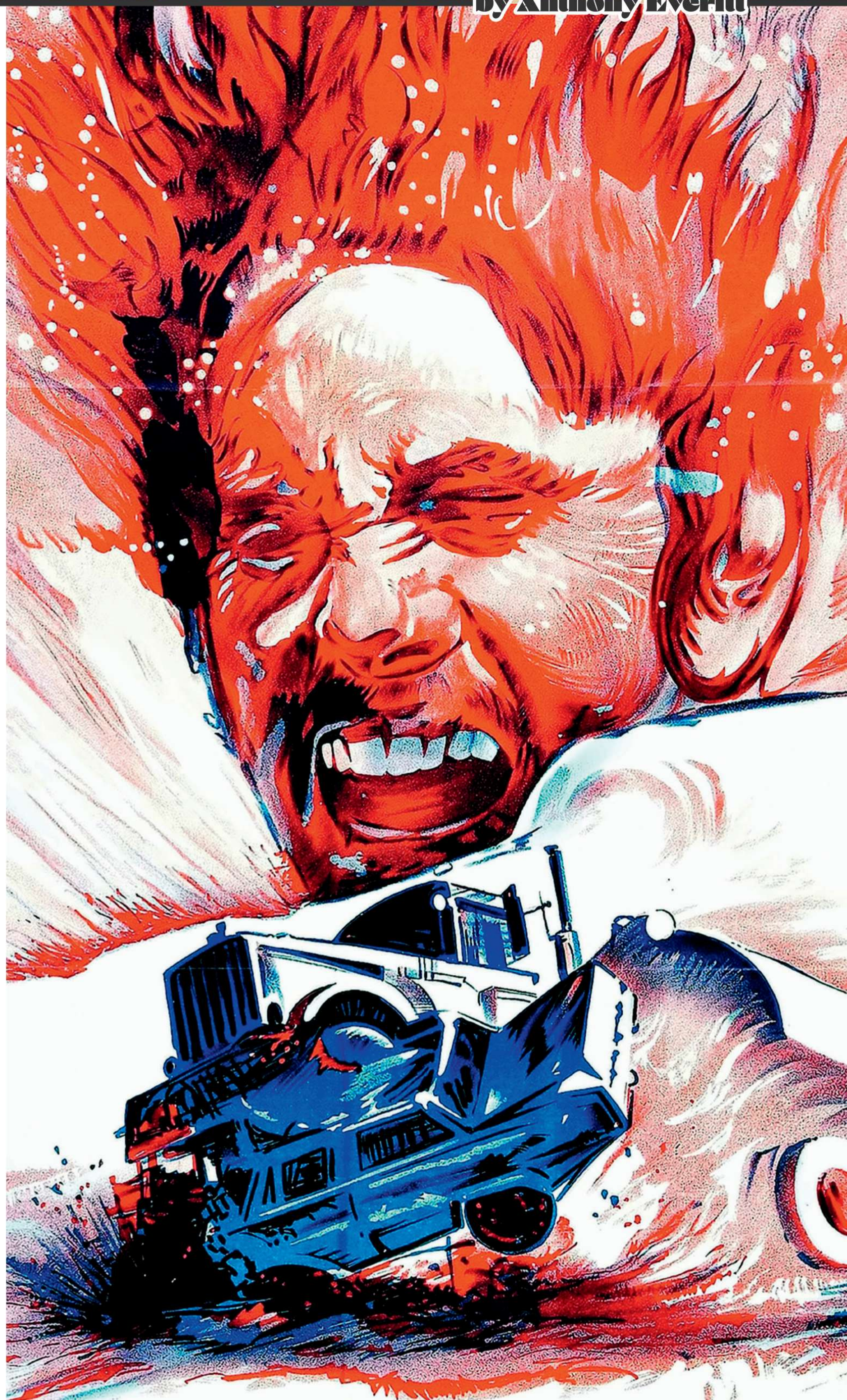
of the SON of DR. CYCLOPS

by Anthony Everitt

DUEL (1971)

In 1957 Richard Matheson flaunted his personal hang-ups with *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. He was probably not doing great fourteen years later when he wrote a novella about a domesticated businessman named "David Mann" unexpectedly fighting for his life against an atavistic, liminal demon trucker. But while even a seasoned director might have shrunk from such emasculating desperation, Steven Spielberg was man enough to lean right in from the opening credits, rolling a radio talk show caller melting down over the "head of household" census question while the viewer is flung face-first down the highway, mounted to a car fender. Matheson's intensity tends to verge on the ridiculous, so a little stylistic throttling helps sustain the proper gravitas and urgency. The young director's unique knack for jump scares is apparent in the first ten minutes, and cineastes will notice a distinctive series of three incrementally tighter close-ups (*a lá* Chief Brody's growing unease at the beach in the moments building up to Alex Kitner's reentry into the food chain and that notoriously hair-raising dolly-zoom) as well as some other trademarks.

After ninety satisfying minutes of vehicular mayhem, plus one spectacular finale, I have no problem buying Mr. "Mann's" triumph over testosterone deficiency. I only wish to pause on the very unmanly disregard for safety standards. There is nothing virile about flouting industry regulation; I am very nearly positive that truck's maximum recommended speed was exceeded on several occasions, and although personal growth obviously requires moments of eustress, surely scoffing at our hallowed regulatory institutions is unnecessary.



THE ABYSS (1989)

I turn now in mild disgust to some hard-earned comfort viewing ("Special Edition," of course; I'm not a bumpkin). Nothing against Spielberg, but I just can't seem to think of any especially beloved dramas of his about extra-terrestrial encounters.

I'm always struck by the depth of this film's tone. James Cameron maintains a pervasive sense of uncertain awe, akin to dread, periodically broken up by explosive, penetrating terror. And he doesn't flinch during action sequences – you feel the wonder and excitement of the moment as much as the abrupt, brutal finality of death and catastrophe. Further, the mirroring of the romantic subplot and the collective crisis of meaning among the crew is surprisingly believable and moving.

That said, do the non-terrestrial intelligences have to fly so close to the nuclear submarine's path? Should they be interrupting trained specialists during some delicate, vital task with their weird displays of bioluminescence and alien energy fields? Who can say? Their technology and safety standards are unknown. But they do make a valid point: nuclear materials are not handled with the care and respect they deserve.

I also think that crew members on experimental, submersible oil drilling rigs need to be trained better than this. It's apparently as much a problem as marine incompetence, a pet peeve of Cameron's which I don't particularly relate to but I'm sure has merit. Ed Harris's frustration over these issues is palpable when he freaks out before the ten minute mark. Maybe it has something to do with almost dying several times on set as well. Anyway, I hope this new Blu-ray release doesn't demoralize any adventurous billionaires out there.

THE MANGLER (1995)

Sometime in the deep past, humans began inventing supernatural boogeymen to deter antisocial or destructive behavior – or so the theory goes. With that in mind, Steven King and Tobe Hooper present us with a parable about a hazardous industrial contraption which turns into a homicidal monster at the slightest contact with human blood. To amplify the suspense, Hooper apparently allowed the cast to improvise the entire script under hypnosis. After all, the only thing more terrifying than a possessed, carnivorous machine is the sleepwalking staff in charge of operating it. At least that's one possible explanation; what I can say is the lines and their delivery offer more high strangeness than *Heart of Glass*, which is almost unwatchable. The fact that nearly every mangling victim somehow meets their fate by leaning casually on the conveyor belt is another red flag.

I know most of you are probably wondering why you should be scared of a haunted laundry press that's mostly a threat to the circumstantially senile. Well, if your concern is meeting production quotas and your manager is shrieking fugue-state nonsense down at you all day from a catwalk, you're gonna prefer the more idiot-proof option. Maybe that's not technically in any regulation handbook, but it should be.

This bold, unexpected, probably-not-an-homage to Herzog did backfire in some areas, however. The set and costume design teams had some difficulty deciding which decade it was and, meanwhile, based on the way he attempted to speak through his tongue the whole time, poor Ted Levine seemed to think he was reliving the production of *The Silence of the Lambs*. 💀

By Eric Vespe

DEATH AND STEPHEN KING

"SOMETIMES DEATH IS NATURAL, A MERCY THAT PUTS AN END TO SUFFERING. BUT ALL TOO OFTEN IT COMES AS AN ASSASSIN, FULL OF SENSELESS CRUELTY AND LACKING ANY VESTIGE OF COMPASSION." - STEPHEN KING, *REVIVAL.*

It might be foolish to look to Stephen King for words of comfort in the wake of a close friend's death. The man isn't exactly known for being kind to his characters. Just ask Gage Creed or Tad Trenton. However, there is an honesty to the way King handles death in his work, especially untimely death, that rings doubly true after you've been directly impacted by the fragility of life.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AND BY SKYLER MOORE

My friend and KINGCAST collaborator Scott Wampler died suddenly on May 31st, 2024. That morning we made plans to push a scheduled recording to the following day so we could both rest up. It had been a long week and we were burning the candle at both ends, banking Kingcast episodes while also working overtime prepping our new show, *The Spiel*, for its imminent debut.

I responded to a few emails and then took a nap. A couple hours later I woke up to the news that Scott had passed away.

I'm writing this on the two-month anniversary of his death, and to say it's been a world-changing two months is an understatement. Thankfully, Scott surrounded himself with great people who have helped the transition into a new normal in ways I'll always be grateful for. We gathered together to send him off in style, holding a combo memorial and party that was just as filled with laughs as it was with tears.

That helped a lot, as did the workload of carrying on with the two shows we concocted together. I'm still plugging away on THE KINGCAST and have transitioned into that dreaded new normal territory, finding that my dives into King's work have taken on a strange new dimension. I'm paying closer attention to the way King handles mortality than I ever have before.

Like I said at the start, it's not always comforting, the way King handles mortality. One of Scott's and my favorite King novels is *Revival*, a true skin-crawler of a story about a man obsessed with piercing the veil and discovering what's on the other side. I won't spoil the ending (one of King's best), but I'll say what that man finds on the other side doesn't exactly fill one with hope for the afterlife.

Pet Sematary is another favorite King novel that paints an even grimmer picture of death, so grim that one of the most famous lines from the story is old Mainer Jud Crandall explaining (maybe a little too late) that "Sometimes, dead is better."

A deeper look into that book hides some positive advice, though. The whole thing is a cautionary tale about what can happen when you don't let a loved one go. Obviously, I'm not going to try to bury Scott in a *Pet Sematary*. I mean, the dude was a handful in life; the last thing the world needs right now is a *Pet Sematary*-ed Wampler running around wreaking havoc.

The message still rings true, at any rate. The best way to honor a loved one isn't to try to hold on to every last little bit of them until you don't recognize what remains. Moving on is part of life, even if you feel guilty about it, and I've certainly had to deal with my fair share of survivor's guilt as I've continued the work we started together.

In a recent conversation with KINGCAST regular Zach Dionne, a writer and editor over at *Complex*, we discussed King's short novel *Elevation*, and I was struck by how that story is about embracing your mortality. The main character of this tale, spookily named Scott Carey, has a problem: He is losing weight. Not mass, mind you, but weight. There's no explanation given, but it becomes clear that one day he will be so light that he's just going to float away.

Elevation is all about accepting your mortality and making your mark while you're here, something *my* Scott certainly did. He always said he was here for a good time, not a long time. I want to make clear that Scott wasn't suicidal, but he seemed to instinctively know he wasn't ever going to be an old man and would often, with his best smirk, talk about how he was looking forward to the peace waiting for him at the end of things.

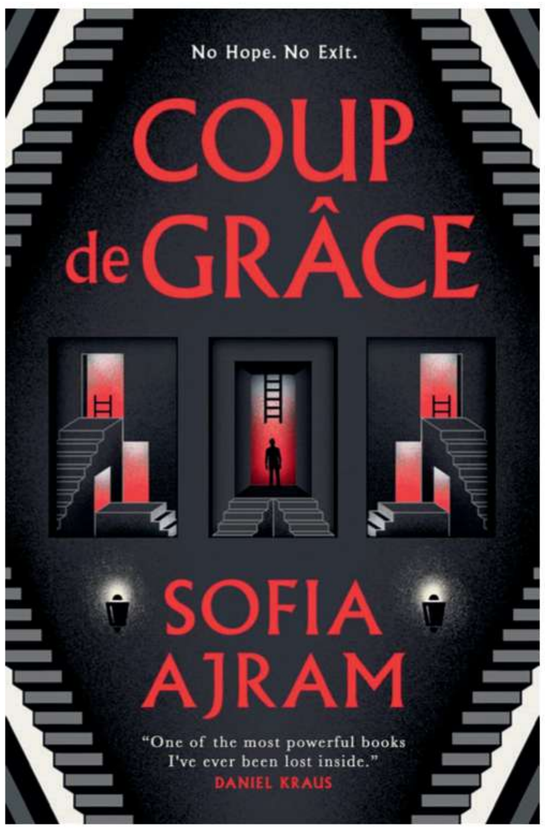
King's story ends with Scott Carey being sent up to the heavens by his closest friends and loved ones in a fireworks display, a smile on his lips as he ascends. This is how I choose to think Scott transitioned into the great unknown. It feels right, and it brings me comfort.

At least more comfort than thinking King got *Revival*'s ending right, anyway. 💀

You can listen to Eric Vespe (@EricVespe) every Wednesday on THE KINGCAST (@Kingcast19), a Stephen King podcast for Stephen King obsessives, brought to you by the FANGORIA Podcast Network.

NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN



COUP DE GRÂCE

DUE OUT:
10/1/2024

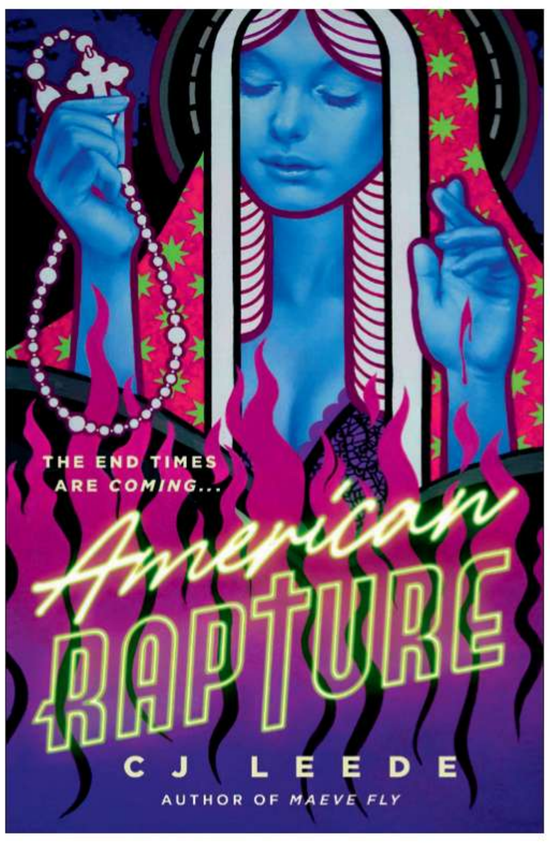
AUTHOR:
Sofia Ajram

PUBLISHER:
Titan

Note: This book centers around suicidal ideations and self-harm.

The Saint Lawrence River is Vicken's final destination. He's going to end it there, for good, after deciding that he's done with his battle against depression. The subway station has other plans for him once it turns into an endless labyrinth of cruel concrete. No exits, no cell service, and no clue about what's going on, Vicken explores the bizarre territory and encounters nightmares in the flesh – and in his head.

Anything can go on in an infinite subway hellscape and it does. The maze is a beast, absorbing victims into its walls and flaying them down to the bone. It literally deconstructs lost humans down to puddles of molten matter. And there lies the unyielding attitude of *Coup de Grâce*. It speaks of mental and chronic illness like the terror it is. Our meta protagonist takes us through the exhaustion and frustration of his predicament. At one point, he even turns to the reader for help. The plot is a stark rumination on purpose and struggle. Vicken is a voice for many who are stuck in the cycle of progression and regression. Sometimes you must speak of your mental state candidly, much to the discomfort of others around you, and Ajram does that with gusto. The tone teeters between cynical and cheeky when it's not tipped over into mind-warping imagery that you can't unread. Above all else, it keeps its promise of no hope. If you're a reader looking for raw discussion from a resolute voice, *Coup de Grâce* may be your next stop.



AMERICAN RAPTURE

DUE OUT:
10/15/2024

AUTHOR:
C.J. Leede

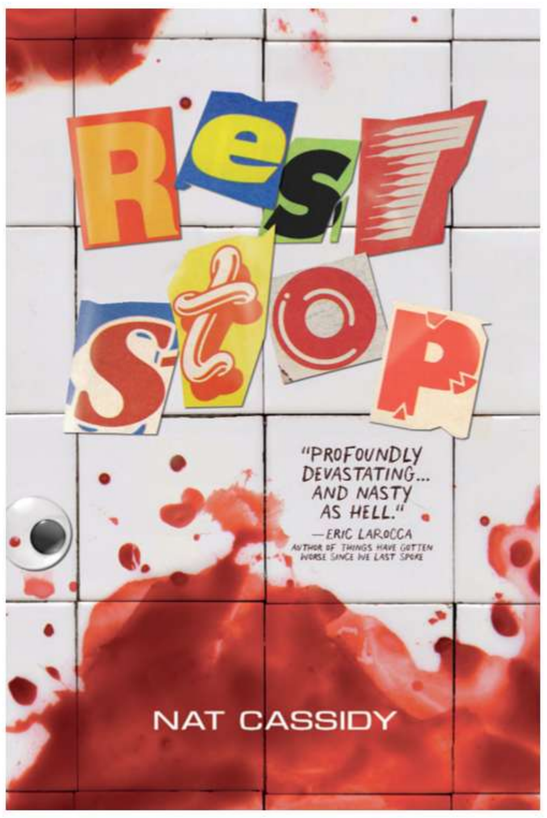
PUBLISHER:
Tor Nightfire

Sophie Allen is, by every definition, a good Catholic girl. Sheltered, ashamed, and choked by sinful feelings, her life is a unique hell of its own. Living under a rock does her no favors when a dangerous virus spreads across the country, one that creates a sexually explicit mania in the infected. Forced to go on the run, she makes her way across the Midwest to find her family through the rage and lust-filled landscape.

The phrase "insane with desire" hits differently in *American Rapture*. The afflicted are feral as they copulate and mangle the softer bits of their victims. There is no restraint on their part, and they will do anything they can to enter you… anywhere. This gushing, glistening violence is poignantly contrasted with the senseless destruction caused by the Crusaders (the religious group who believes the virus is a cleansing). Both are terrifying, but only one has a vaccine.

Sophie's coming-of-age is a twofold journey: surviving the end times and understanding the current times. Her rude awakening exposes her own internalized guilt and trauma. Simultaneously, she finds normality and acceptance for her innate yearnings. C.J. Leede is dauntless as she calls out the hypocrisy of purity culture. The legitimate examples of sex shaming and propaganda in the book play perfectly into its satirical structure. It's a dark read, leaving little room for feel-good moments. *American Rapture* is a telling commentary that churns with anger and pleads for change. It's a war between the innocent, the ignorant, and those who gain from both.

TO END A GREAT YEAR OF FEAR, WE HAVE SOME HARD-HITTING TALES THAT DON'T HOLD BACK, AND CERTAINLY DON'T LACK. They mince flesh, not words. They bring the intensity of horror without sacrificing solid storytelling. Hardcore without the harsh taste, if you will. These are neither quiet terrors nor cozy reads. They are not your grandma's horror novels. It's October – what did you expect?


Rest Stop
"PROFOUNDLY DEVASTATING... AND NASTY AS HELL."
—ERIC LAROCCA
AUTHOR OF THINGS HAVE GOTTEN WORSE SINCE WE LAST SPOKE
NAT CASSIDY

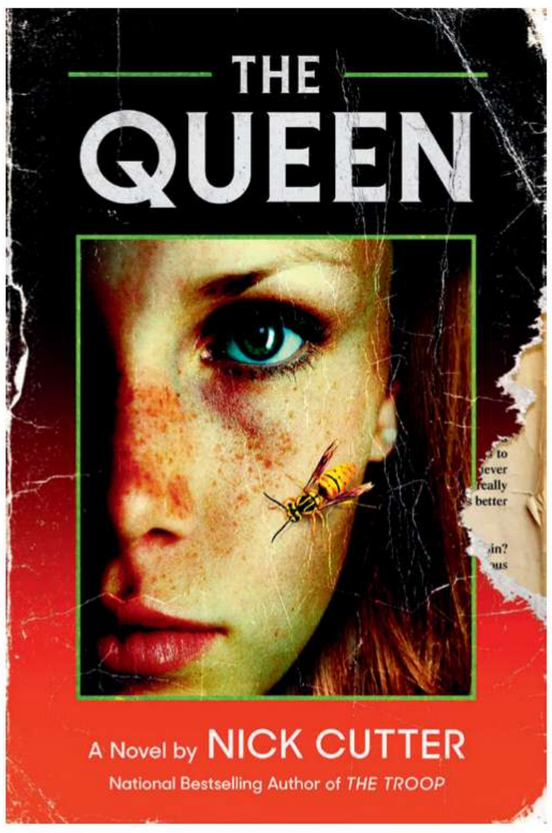
REST STOP

DUE OUT:
10/15/2024

AUTHOR:
Nat Cassidy

PUBLISHER:
Shortwave Publishing

It's in the late-night hours when Abe begrudgingly hits the road. He blew off band practice to trek out into the night to visit his grandmother in the hospital. Better yet, his brother won't stop calling him about his ETA. They're lucky he's even on the road at all. Just one quick break at a gas station, and he'll be back on track. However, Abe finds himself trapped in the bathroom, and he's not leaving anytime soon – not unscathed, anyway. *Rest Stop* is a platter of phobias served up in a mean, lean novella. You'll be treated to (or tortured by) creepy crawlies of all sorts, dark spaces, and a psychopathic bloodbath. But the standout antagonist is the protagonist's own psyche. Throughout Abe's dilemma, he's guided by a couple of different voices and berated by his own self-doubt. His memories and insecurities are copilots to his nightmarish situation, giving the story an arresting tone and a steady pulse of tension. The plot takes a lot of well-timed turns that continue to raise the stakes when you thought they couldn't go any higher. It even finds room for snarky anecdotes and music references that yacht rock fans will gladly hum along to. Cassidy spared no prose to unnerve you in *Rest Stop*. With an onslaught of triggers and a single-location setting, it's stupidly easy to get wigged out by the end. Luckily, for every scare, there is a sense of resilience and a laugh in the face of fear to get you there.



THE QUEEN

DUE OUT:
10/29/2024

AUTHOR:
Nick Cutter

PUBLISHER:
Gallery Books

Everyone thinks Charity Atwater is dead, including her best friend Margaret. No one has heard from her since an ill-fated party, until an iPhone arrives at Margaret's house. The texts coming in are cryptic and demanding, but she follows their instructions in hopes of finding out what happened to her friend. Over the course of a day, Margaret is sent on a demented scavenger hunt through town that leads to the monstrous truths about Charity, their friendship, and experiments gone awry.

Cutter throws readers right into the muck and does not ease up. The deaths are uncomfortably descriptive and grotesque in their creativity, and purer minds may short-out trying to envision this brand of body horror. It's a goopy, wet, and unnatural affair, but at its core is a story of fierce dedication. Two social misfits cling to a lifelong bond as they inevitably change and diverge. In the opposing plotline, a diabolical villain is hellbent on making his disturbing vision come to life. When they intersect, the outcome is a bewildering puzzle slamming into place. Your eyes can't believe it, but it happened. A notable strength is the air of trepidation that lasts to the very last sentence. Influences come from many directions, notably true crime cases and Cronenberg's *The Fly*. Nearly every page toys with your emotions, and the others test your stomach. *The Queen* is a disgusting adventure with so much heart and so much despair. It is, without question, the barbaric perversity of nature in book form.

Contributors' Crypt

Our talented roster of contributors have lots going on besides Fango bylines. See what else they're up to on their various social media feeds!

Reyna Cervantes ..... @Jfcdoomblade

BJ Colangelo ..... @BJColangelo

Kalyn Corrigan ..... @kalyncorrigan

Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton

Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines

Stephen Graham Jones .....

..... @stephengrahamjones

Lauren LaVera ..... @_LaurenLaVera_

Diandra Lazor ..... @sassysledgehammer

Rebekah McKendry @rebekahmckendry

Richard Newby ..... @rnewb

Amber T ..... @hornbloodfire

Vannah Taylor ..... @sirendeathcult

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Hey Seabeard, thanks for nursing these haunted old bones back to life.

Sean - A lifesaver on this one.
Thanks for jumping in!

MV - Thanks for being the rising tide when it's needed round these parts.

Are you listening to Vision Video yet? Google it and thank me later!

Gomes - Here's to leaving what no longer serves you behind and taking the (scary!) next step. We got this!

Summer, I love you with all my heart. But please watch some horror films with me.
- Samuel

Shameless plug for my Insta page so I can maybe finally break 3k followers after 4 plus years @yankee_dawg_photo

J & A - Excited to take part in your big day, and hoping I don't screw my duties up!
- Love, PN

Keep going to the theater Keep buying physical copies Keep loving horror♥

Blood, Guts, Gore are on menu at ROTTEN FM (rotten_fm). A podcast hosted by your rotten ex-girlfriends covering your favorite horror and Metal music selections. Available on Apple and Spotify!

Simi - what are you dressing up for this Halloween? Better be GORY. Nice job cracking the *Longlegs* code last issue. Daddy can't help you now. See you on the streets - Freddy

Does every horror fan have a podcast nowadays? Anyways, check out our podcast Screams from the Basement. We like the horror movies too.

I've been reading Fangoria since I was a kid. Back then, I did it sipping Coca-Cola. Now I do it sipping whisky. Even better. (Angelsportion.com).

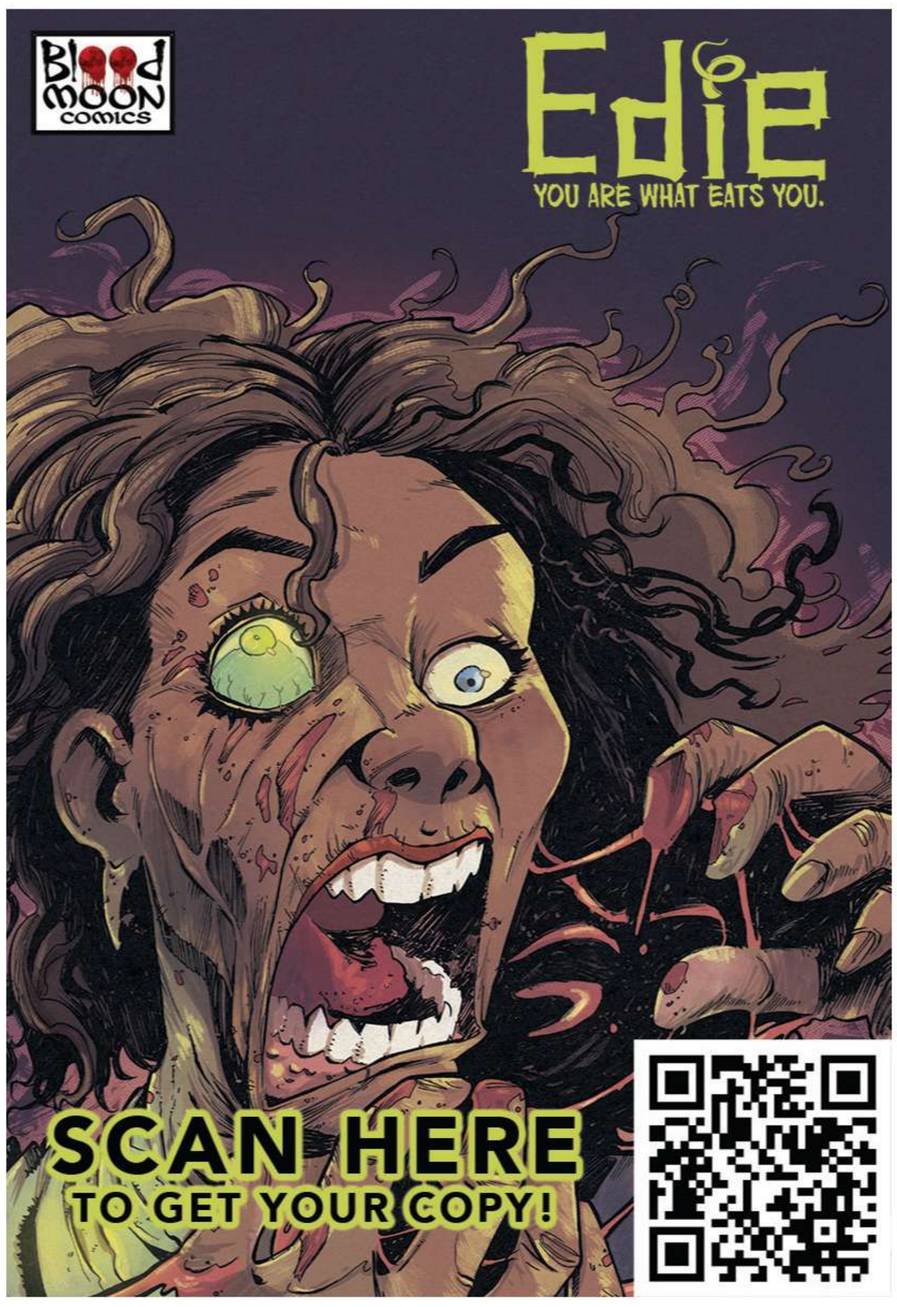
Candy corn is good, actually and it's time for folks to put some respect on the superior Halloween treat. Children of the Candy Corn, rise up! Happy Halloween, creeps!

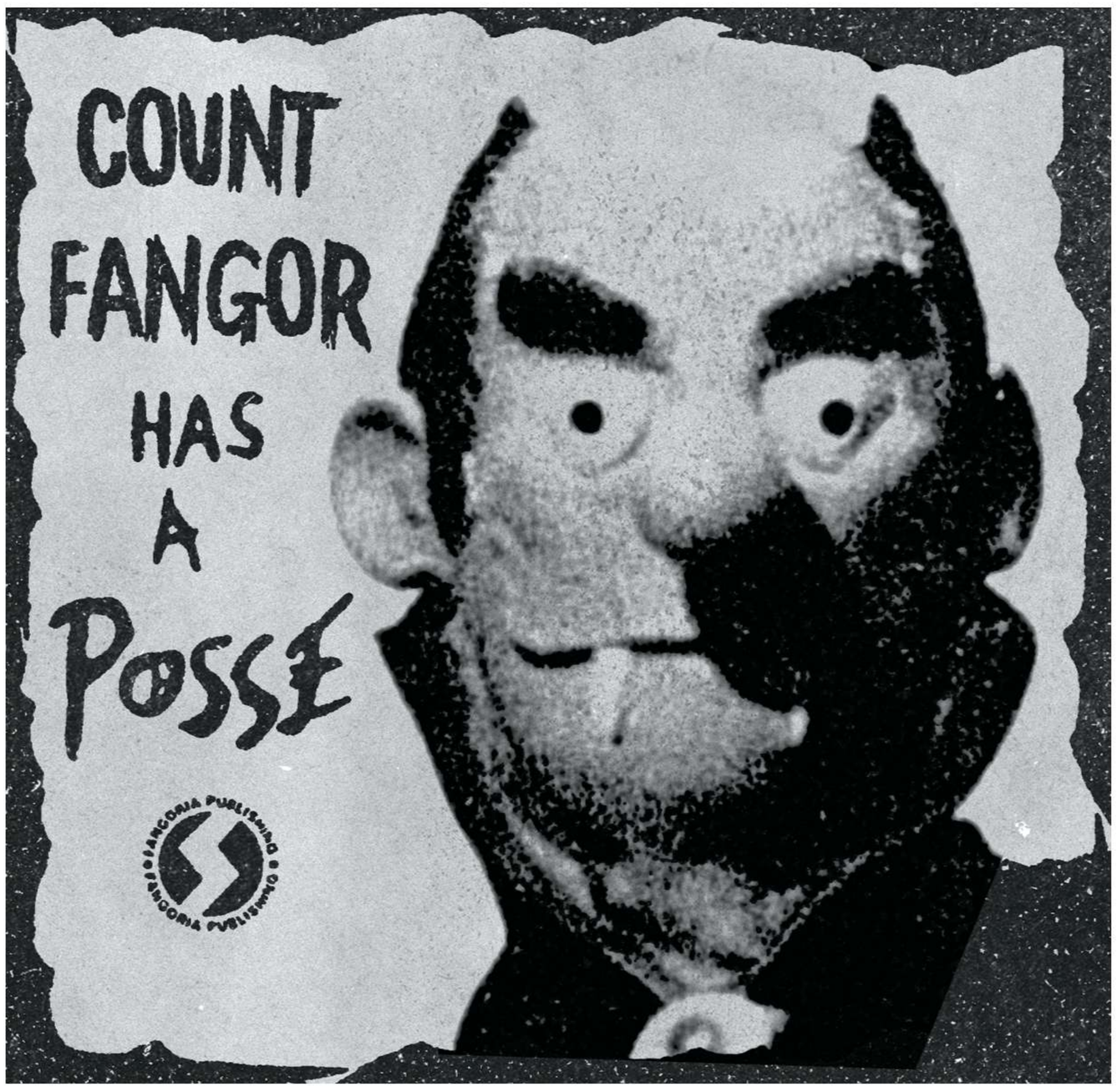
8 years of marriage (10 years together) and you don't get my horror addiction...but somehow you get me. Love u 4eva Dr. Clark, happy anniversary. Love, Dustin.

Because of this gig at Fango, I have been fortunate to meet many rad people. Some have become friends, but the most rad person I have met because of this gig is my fiancé. And next month we will be married! Thanks, Alyssa, for everything and supporting all the weird things I do at Fango. ♥U, JK

Things to Come

To hell with seeing Mommy kissing Santa Claus; if you've been very good this year, FANGORIA #26 might show you *Nosferatu* making *Heart Eyes* at the *Wolf Man*. Keep an eye under your tree (provided you leave your tree up for a week or so after Christmas...)





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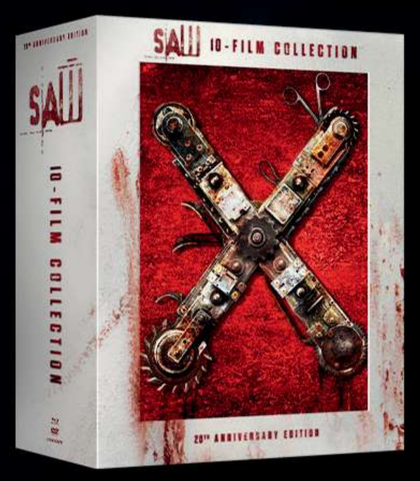

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